Contemporary Writing in East Pakistan

fifteen essays in criticism

Edited by

Sarwar Murshid

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CONTEMPORARY WRITING IN EAST PAKISTAN

Fifteen Essys in Criticism

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PREFACE

These essays, which represent a critical survey of East Pakistan's literature since independence, were written for a series of seminars sponsored jointly by the English Department of the University of Dacca and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Their aim was 'to examine our literature in the wider perspective of European and American literature', 'to expose and analyse its weaknesses and deficiencies', and 'to suggest remedies for them'.

The critics have generally kept the European and American perspectives in view, and, in spite of their avowedly depreciatory aim, have succeeded in clarifying and illustrating the nature of many of our literary problems. None, it is hoped, has been humourless enough to offer infallible 'remedies'.

The value of world consciousness in literature, as also in its judgment, has been fully emphasised, but the need to bear Western parallels constantly in mind may occasionally have resulted in a certain disproportion in scale.

Despite the remarkable critical self-consciousness displayed in these pages and the contributors' generous appropriation of space, it would be useful to remember that post-independence Bengali literature in East Pakistan is not vast.

The essays however constitute an event of importance in the field of criticism in this country in that they attempt a truly systematic and searching investigation of contemporary literature and comment not only on current trends but reflect the prospects of the immediate future in the field of letters.

Editor

CRITICISM

Abu Rushd Matinuddin

PLATO'S celebrated attack on poetry in the tenth book of the Republic ends with a touch of compunction. If, Plato says, anybody can defend poetry in plain prose and prove that she is helpful to society, Plato promised to listen in a kindly spirit.

The defence of poetry came from the most famous of Plato's pupils, Aristotle. Not possessing his master's persuasive artistry, Aristotle was nevertheless able to defend poetry on the basis of facts.

Of course, it is possible to detect flaws even in the *Poetics*. Apart from the fact that we possess only the first part of the work, the *Poetics* is imperfect stylistically and presents many obscurities even to acknowledged scholars of the Greek language, as Professor Gilbert Murray has shown in his preface to Bywater's famous translation of the *Poetics*.

But the positive merits of the *Poetics* are many as Professor Murray has further shown. It contains varied information about Greek literature ; seeks to establish a sort of order in the field of creative writing ; investigates what is good in art and what makes it good and lays the greatest stress on the need for unity in the work of art. In short, the classical view of artistic criticism is embodied in the *Poetics*.

It is true that this view is sometimes rebelled against as, say, in the critical utterances of a Lamb or a Walter Raleigh or a Tagore. But it remains the core of all objective criticism.

The romantic view of artistic criticism cannot of course be ignored. In Coleridge we find the combination of an abstract reasoning power and the ability to sum up a character in a telling phrase or two. His famous observation on Iago's search for a plausible defence—'the motive-hunting of a motiveless-malignity'—is a case in point. Even Bradley, with all his amazing gift for analysis, is in his perception not always far removed from the romantic temper. Nor is, among the moderns, Lord David Cecil—in whom acuteness of mind is as evident as the power of synthesis—whose command of brilliantly evocative prose is clearly a romantic trait. Consider, for example, his appraisement of Emily Bronte in his *Early Victorian Novelists*.

To day the classical view of criticism is represented in England in the critical essays of Eliot and in America in those of Lionel Trilling. The unexcited accuracy of Eliot's prose and his learning give to all his critical utterances a certain clarity and weight. The quality he somewhat lacks is the quality of sympathy. One admires the urgent precision of Trilling's balanced prose and his cool, unflurried appraisal. Both these critics are, no doubt, directly in the line of Dr. Johnson who in his preface to Shakespeare and *Lives of Poets* had shown what factual criticism can achieve.

From what has been said above, it is now possible to have some idea about what constitutes the true critical temper. The primary function of a critic is to judge. Hence, first of all he requires thorough familiarity with the subject he is going to judge. But knowledge alone will not carry him far.

'The pale cast of thought' must not be something unknown to him and he must possess the power of analysis. Excellent critical virtues as they are, they do not by themselves constitute the true critical temper in which sympathetic understanding is indeed an inseparable element. While examining a work of of art, a critic must not, as Aristotle has justly warned us, expect of it 'every sort of pleasure.' Nor must he fail to take into account the peculiar circumstances, if any, preceding a work of art.

So, knowledge, thought, analysis, sympathetic understanding and, of course, the power of synthesis are qualities most required in a critic. Now, let us see how far these qualities are reflected in our own critical endeavour.

A pioneer in criticism was Ekramuddin whose *Rabindra Protibha* is one of the earliest attempts to assess the creative genius of Tagore, a task which he achieved with a fair measure of competence. The next significant critical efforts were made by Humayun Kabir and Abdul Kadir. Humayun Kabir, now politically lost to us, contributed about twenty years ago a remarkable essay called *Islam and Bharatbarsha* to the monthly *Mohammodi*—which dispassionately examined the role of Islam in India and stressed the new consciousness of dignity which it gave to the individual. The critical essays that followed showed careful scholarship and rare discernment and were written in fine, limpid prose. His *Banglar Kabya*, a study of the growth and development of Bengali poetry written before Independence, throughout bore the impress of a perceptive mind and displayed a refreshingly original outlook together with a sharp awareness of the effects of Islam on Bengali sensibility.

What Humayun Kabir achieved in the matter of analysis and interpretation was a little beyond the power of the Muslim critics that followed him. Abdul Kadir, of course, was not overawed by the critical equipment of Humayun Kabir and showed his mettle in the essays he wrote on Bengali metre and prosody. His present occasional utterances on literature are those of one who has firmly persuaded himself that tradition is always a more significant operative force in literature than modernism. Anything approaching complex sensibility at once arouses his distrust. An example of this is the radio talk which he gave about a year ago on modern poetry in which he spoke against experiment and contemporaneity in poetry.

Muhammad Barkatullah was not concerned with initiating any thought movement when he wrote his *Parashya Protibha*—a fairly successful attempt, in the laudatory vein, to make his readers familiar with ancient Persian poetry. The work undoubtedly helped to foster among its readers a sense of pride in the past literary achievements of Muslims. Carrying on the crusade for rationalism from before independence were two gifted critics both unfortunately dead now. The more prolific and versatile of them was Muhammad Wajid Ali who throughout sought to create a taste for truth in elegant prose and refused to compromise with cant. It is to be regretted that his fine perceptive essays are not available in book form. The other critic was Motahar Husain Chowdhury who wrote sparingly but with precision, edge and depth. His writings, too, are scattered over periodicals and unless

soon collected in book form they will be lost to us—which will indeed be a catastrophe for our incipient critical literature.

After independence, the first critical work of note was Nazirul Islam's *Bangla Shahityer Nutan Itihash*. The very title of the work is indicative of the author's purpose which is nothing less than to write a new history of Bengali literature.

This is a worthy aim which at the very outset is heavily prejudiced by a startling statement to the effect that Bengali is not an Aryan language, but closely allied to a language spoken in Poundra Bardhan Puri—an ancient capital of Bengal close to the present district of Bogra.

Instantaneous and sharp as the impact of this statement is on the reader's mind, he naturally expects to find some decisive evidence in support of a theory so unorthodox. But this the author is unable to provide, and even his historical arguments do not always carry conviction.

This is indeed a disabling burden which even an astonishing genius cannot comfortably carry. The reader feels sorry that the author chose to impose such a limitation upon himself. His sorrow becomes acuter as he reads the ninth and thirteenth chapters of the book which deal with the question of literary outlook and appreciation, and the influence of British rule upon Bengali literature, respectively. In both these chapters the author brings to bear a new outlook on familiar facts and reveals a well-developed power of synthesis.

What distinguishes Dr. Shahidullah's criticism is the wealth of facts and figures it provides. His *Bangla Shahityer Katha*, a 1953 publication, reveals his erudition. The work is meant to be the first part of his contemplated history of Bengali literature and contains a multiplicity of facts and figures which sometimes overwhelm the reader. At times, the reader desperately wishes that the author would give him more interpretation and fewer facts.

Another recent publication of Dr. Shahidullah, whose linguistic background is of unquestionable merit, is *Vidyapati Shatak*. The most valuable part of the learned preface to the book is a detailed account of Maitheelee grammar—the knowledge of which makes the reading of Vidyapati a truly enjoyable experience.

Dr. Enamul Huq's fastidious learning is indisputable. It is therefore a little surprising that his latest critical publication *Muslim Bangla Shahitya* (1955) should have caused an acrimonious and prolonged controversy. The controversy has centred round two things : Dr. Huq's interpretation of the word 'Bangla' and his literary outlook.

Dr. Huq's views on the derivation of the word 'Bangla' and the origin of the Bengali language have been challenged by some of our notable writers, including Moulana Akram Khan and Gholam Mustafa. Dr. Huq has mainly relied on the evidence of *Ain-i-Akbari*, a famous work by Emperor Akbar's courtier Abul Fazal, for his theory that the word 'Bangla' has been derived from 'Banga' plus Al (Sanskrit Ali). The origin of the Bengali language, according to Dr. Huq, can be traced back to Prakrit, a language older than Sanskrit. In support of the latter assertion Dr. Huq has only indirectly

referred to the findings of Western and Oriental philologists but given in the body of the book no conclusive evidence or documentary proof. Perhaps he did not think this necessary under the impression that the mass of evidence in support of his statement is already overwhelming. Nevertheless, in a book of such scope and intent, important statements must at all stages be backed up by solid, incontestable evidence.

Those who charge Dr. Huq with minimising the Islamic content of Bengali literature have obviously not given to the book the close study it deserves. Apart from a whole chapter on Islamic environment in the Turkish period, he shows the influence of Islam on the teachings of Chaitanyadev (1485-1533) and that of Sufism on Vaishnab poetry in the second chapter of his book. Chandidas's famous line in Bengali extolling the supremacy of man is a clear echo of the new dignity which Islam had brought to the individual—a point earlier stressed by Humayun Kabir in his *Banglar Kabyo.*

The chapters of *Muslim Bangla Shahitya* dealing with the Turkish and Mughal periods are exhaustive and might easily form—together with Dr. Shahidullah's *Bangla Shahityer Katha*—a fairly full account of the earlier periods of Bengali literature.

Where Dr. Huq's book is clearly deficient is in its treatment of the modern period. Only Nazrul Islam receives some detailed notice ; all others are merely catalogued, and that too perfunctorily. No attempt is made to analyse the trends embodied in recent writings or to appraise individual works.

The modern period in Bengali literature, with particular reference to Muslim authors, is sought to be fully covered in *Bangla Shahityer Itibritto*, a conjoint endeavour of two University teachers of Bengali, Mr. Ali Ahsan of Karachi University and Mr. Abdul Hai of the University of Dacca. If this work could be linked up with Dr. Enamul Huq's work on the middle period, and that of Dr. Shahidullah on the ancient period in Bengali literature, the combined thing would make a complete and fairly satisfactory work of reference.

The most obvious drawback of *Bangla Shahityer Itibritto* as a literary piece is the clear lack of co-ordination between the two authors. Aristotle's dictum that the most important element in a literary work is the unity of design is more or less disregarded in this work. It is not at all clear what particular outlook, if any, the book is designed to embody or illustrate.

One charge frequently made against *Bangla Shahityer Itibritto* is that of plagiarism. On scrutiny, however, it is found that the authors have mostly acknowledged, though not so prominently, the materials they have borrowed. The book's chief merit lies in its compilation of facts. Although there is not much evidence of any actual acquaintance with the manuscripts the writers mention, they seem to have made use of all available scholarly materials.

The book is richer in its background information than in the facts relating to our present-day literature. Mr. Hai admits that his survey of our writings of the last two decades is mainly based on the occasional discussions which he had with some of his literary friends. This is not the scholarly approach—which requires first-hand knowledge of the materials discussed.

Again, Mr. Hai ignores the prose writings after independence and gives an incomplete account of Muslim Bengali literature immediately preceding Pakistan. But Mr. Hai's chapter on Islamic literature is a notable piece of analysis and scholarship. Therein he has indicated two important trends in the Muslim writings of the first two decades of the 20th century and shown how one trend culminated in the Pakistan movement and the literature based on it—say, the works of Furrukh Ahmed in poetry and those of Hasan Zaman in prose—and the other in today's liberal humanism.

Mr. Ali Ahsan's most important contribution to *Bangla Shahityer Itibritto* is a chapter mainly devoted to Nazrul Islam which is marked by the author's clear hostility to the rebel poet. Mr. Ahsan sees quite clearly what is crude and colloquial and topical in Nazrul Islam but shows no appreciation of the poet's amazing vitality and great daring or fine musical sense. A critic wholly out of sympathy with a particular author cannot say anything of value about him, as even the most brilliant perception cannot satisfactorily work upon a foundation of negatives.

One cannot convict Mr. Ali Ahsan of any particularly acute perception : therefore, his negative attitude is all the more to be deplored. Mr. Ali Ahsan's separate book on Nazrul is perhaps the most notable example in our critical literature of purely destructive zeal.

Dr. Sajjad Husain is properly appreciative, more objectively than Abdul Kadir, of the value of tradition in literature. In his critical writings one almost invariably finds a happy union between his religious sense and his scientific perception. Sometimes, however, his tendency to think in abstract terms results in a certain vagueness. Again, some of his critical utterances betray more anger than discernment. Consider, for example, his book-reviews in which he reveals his irritation over the incompetence of our writing and does not usually make a sympathetic appraisal of its merits.

Mr. Ali Ashraf seems to be well trained in the Western methods of criticism. Like his elder brother Mr. Ali Ahsan, he makes good use of the comparative method and shows in the process a fairly knowledgeable mind. But his references to the classics are all too quickly made, and he betrays a curious unwillingness to be in their company for long. He is not always careful about his facts. Nevertheless, his information is extensive and this is revealed in his *Kabya Parichay* which contains many promising materials.

Hasan Zaman has of late attracted some attention as a critic. He is well-read and has an urgent religious sense—a quality which he shares with Dr. Sajjad Husain. He has a lot of enthusiasm, what is lacking in him is the orderliness of thought.

A quick-conceiving critic is Munier Chowdhury. But he has so far exercised his influence through the spoken, and not the written, word, and unless he attracts a chronicler of his sayings of the calibre of a Boswell, one would not know how to judge him.

Mufazzal Haider Chowdhury, unlike Munier Chowdhury, writes with fair regularity. His affinities are with the group whose first notable representative was the late Abul Husain. He does not see much merit in the view that regards Hindus and Muslims as two separate cultural entities and

shows no particular awareness of the important role of Islam in Bengali literature. This would not be a crippling handicap as a critic if he possessed originality. One cannot honestly concede this to him, as most of his views echo those heard long ago. Among the younger critics of today, mention may be made of Hasan Hafizur Rahman, Alauddin Al-Azad and Ashraf Siddiqui. They all have the power of exposition, and their writings show every sign of moving towards maturity. They, like their seniors, are greatly handicapped because of the lack of serious journals in East Pakistan--a fact which has done incalculable harm to our literature, both critical and creative. Our reading public is not wide, and most of them are more interested in literature from abroad than in our own. Our writers have been blamed for this unsatisfactory state of affairs and charged with incompetence. Even supposing this is true, the reading public cannot escape its share of blame because their active interest can give new heart to our writers and thus provide a favourable literary climate.

From the above brief account of our critical endeavour, faulty and rambling as it is, it is possible to reach certain conclusions. First, the finer of our critics embody in their writings, in various degrees, the qualities which have been taken to constitute the true critical temper : knowledge, analysis, sympathy, synthesis, etc.

Secondly, most of our critics are academicians ; hence, the heavy stress on objectivity, the classical view of artistic criticism. The raptures of a Lamb are seldom to be found in our critical literature. The imaginative sweep of romantic criticism would seem to be outside the scope of our critical intention. This is a real loss for much of our objective criticism is dry as dust. Thirdly, there has been no particular or clear development in the quality of our critical endeavour except perhaps in the widening of knowledge embodied in the writings of those with some Western background.

One fact that has not been stressed above is the astonishing immaturity of the general body of our critical writings. There is something in our landscape, so temptingly reposeful, which perhaps encourages a certain indolence both physical and mental. Not for us the hard discipline of sustained thought. What we generally most relish is a quick succession of unconnected remarks confidently expressed. This, however, is not the way of responsible criticism which is a matter of knowledge and perception. It is not easy to acquire either of these qualities ; the latter certainly cannot be all acquired, but must be partly ingrained.

Our criticism at its best is, we must remember, only of moderate quality and must go a long way before it can contribute anything of lasting significance—say, something like 'the objective correlative' of Eliot. But, then, criticism is a literary growth later than poetry and drama or fiction. Considering that our creative literature is still in the formative stage, suffering all the expected pangs, it would be idle to expect a uniformly good standard in our critical literature. Nevertheless the indications are there of a fairly common awareness that criticism in East Pakistan must be made a vehicle of reasoned thinking and a helpful companion of creative literature.

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

THE poet in East Pakistan, who is generally a Muslim, has a split mind in his approach to modern Bengali literature, if he is conscious of h's Islamic heritage. He does not respond with his whole being to this literature because his religious culture is inadequately represented in it and there is much in it which, in a sense, is alien to him. But still the fact remains that the poet of East Pakistan has accepted the tradition of Bengali literature. The sense of its incompleteness is shared practically by all. Those who feel it the most are active in enriching the tradition and making it more representative. Their aim is to bring about a rehabilitation of the sensibility in the sphere of literature generally, and particularly of poetry. The literary tension in East Pakistan is all about this question : What is, or ougnt to be our tradition, and most of our poets have sought an answer to it. On the basis of their conception of tradition our poets easily fall into two groups ; the concern of the first group being the Muslim literary tradition, that of the second group being merely the tradition of Bengal. The first tradition cuts across national and linguistic boundaries and covers a wider range of history, while the second tradition is more limited in time and more well-defined in its boundaries. The emphasis of the first tradition is on the content, that of the second, on the form of poetry.

Prominent among the first group is Farrukh Ahmed, and one of the most prolific too. His poetry is of utmost significance, because for nearly two decades he, perhaps more than any other poet, has sought to restore the contact between individual sensibility and traditional culture. He has sought the sources of tradition in two directions : one, Islam, its prophet and saints and, two, the myths and romances which have a Muslim setting. *Sirajam-Munira* is the result of the first expedition, *Shat Shagarer Majhi*, the result of the second, and, as is to be expected, the myths and romances prove to be the better field for poetic treatment than history. Though the poems of the two volumes belong to the same period, the myth-poems show better workmanship than the poems of faith and homage. One reason why this is so may be that the *Sirajam-Munira* poems belong to the same family of poetry to which belong Satyen Datta's poems on Gandhiji and Jesus Christ and Nazrul Islam's poems on C. R. Das and Khalid. These poems keep a middle flight, are long and loud, energetic and hortatory. In his other volume Farrukh was writing as no body else before him had written. Here we have the essence of pure romanticism, with the notable exception of the poem named 'Lash'. Poetry in this volume is highly sensuous and evocative. One can possibly say that the later sonnets (including *Dilruba*) have descended from this volume, while the satires and poems of social passion descend from *Sirajam-Munira*. The shadowy sailors of the myth-poems ply their ships in shadowy waters, they talk about Baghdad, symbolising settled and slothful life. Life on the high seas is full of toils and full of rewards, as the merchandize they carry is rich beyond description.

Farrukh has great command over verbal music, and one can always expect a memorable line, and the ability to write such lines is one of the signs of a true poet. But his felicity with words occasionally proves to be a doubtful gift. When for example, the primary requirement is precision and exactness of expression, he easily achieves musicality without attaining the other, and more important, objective. This can be felt particularly in *Dilruba*, a sonnet sequence where a faint outline of a theme of personal emotion is suggested. But nothing can be personal without being particular and in these sonnets a certain vagueness and generality of emotion blurs the picture. The intimacy of tone one expects in love poetry is lost in a somewhat full-throated rhetoric. Taken as a whole the *Dilruba* sonnets must be reckoned a failure though always rich in verbal music and occasionally in striking images.

Other poets of this school, Talim Husain, Mufakkharul Islam, Abdur Rashid Wasekpuri and perhaps, Raushan Yazdani, have one general drawback : they all lack the first requisite of a modern poet, the ability to write a kind of verse which has profited from the technical developments already achieved. Their verse shows that their taste has been formed by the poetry of the 'twenties. Surely, we have made very rapid strides since then. Nazrul's poetry is now definitely dated and the large majority of our versifiers, including the poets just named, write bad Nazrul verse, excepting Yazdani who writes in dialect. Like Jasimuddin, Yazdani's subject is the country and the country people, but, he, unlike Jasim, has employed the rustic language both in *Chinubibi*, a folk narrative and in *Rangila Bandhu*, a collection of lyrics, evidently because his setting is rustic and also probably because he writes for the literate rustic. This last fact puts Yazdani's poetry outside our scope. The other three make a different case. Talim's imaginative range, to judge from *Dishari*, is limited : he writes national hymns and songs and patriotic poetry in the kind of energetic verse which Nazrul frequently, and Mohitlal occasionally, wrote and the English counterpart of which one finds in Kipling. Abdur Rashid Wasekpuri, besides occasional verses, has written a narrative called *Amir Saodagar* the story being taken from a Puthi. Where Farrukh's method is lyric and evocative, that of Wasekpuri is plainly narrative, free from symbolism. Wasekpuri and Mufakkharul Islam together typify the dangers of innovation in the use of words when done without imagination.

The fault is not with the words but their use, or their abuse, and the fundamental lack of basic 'auditory imagination'. Farrukh, who can be the boldest of innovators in his use of Puthi words and words of Arabic and Persian origin, can also write, when he chooses, in a pure Sanscritic diction. In fact, a majority of his earliest poems and nearly all his sonnets, in point of diction, could as well be Mohitlal's. There has been a lot of useless controversy over the question of language generally, and the question of poetic diction in particular. The issue, to me, is simple enough. Any sensitive reader of poetry can see for himself where innovation has contributed to the total beauty of a passage and where it has not. In the former case, an initial unfamiliarity with the particular word can be easily removed. When a passage, in spite of its obscurity, suggests beauty, the obscurity itself may ultimately prove to be a part of the poetic design. And very often this is the result of the extra compression of which instances abound in Bishnu Dey and Sudhin Datta.

To come back to Mufakkharul Islam. For us his importance lies in this that he typifies the dangers of innovation in a particular field of our poetry, viz., diction, where, nonetheless, experimentation ought to be continued. I am inclined to think that the Puthi diction was itself artificial, and though it can supply a number of words (and images), the diction itself cannot be revived.

The thematic resource of the Puthis is a different matter. There, one feels, the Puthi can be profitably tapped as Farrukh has tapped it. It can supply a story for a poet to re-tell it, as Wasekpuri has done or as Abdur Rashid Khan, in his 'Mahua', has tried to do. Khan takes simply the story, but his diction is absolutely free from Puthi-words. Where Khan has erred, I think, is in his choice of the sonnet-form in writing a narrative. His verse moves more slowly than even Syed Ali Ahsan's *Chahar Darvesh*, written in a sprawling metre. Ahsan's metre has at least the potentiality of being animated and quickened, the sonnet written in long 'payar' has none.

Some of the shorter poems of A. R. Khan, collected in a volume *Nakkhatra : Manush : Mana* offer readable poetry. These personal lyrics, many of them love poems, are written in a liquid nerveless verse made popular by the success of Ashraf Siddiqui. In fairness to Khan I must say that these poems are generally better organized than Siddiqui's. Why he should be under the latter's spell, especially when the spell is anything but wholesome, I do not understand, and I can only conclude that his poetic personality, like the latter's, is extremely passive and malleable.

Why, outside Farrukh Ahmed, this group of poets has achieved little so far, may be worth investigating. I would like to suggest here that the poets have set themselves a difficult task. Since the Muslim cultural tradition has had no literary counterpart worth the name in Bengali, they, instead of breathing in a particular atmosphere, have to spend a lot of energy in trying to get at the sources of this tradition. I am aware that the Puthi forms some sort of literary tradition reflecting the communal mind, but this tradition, excepting the Arakan court poetry, supplied the needs not of the cultivated but of the masses and it is doubtful how much of it really satisfies our definition of literature. For the Indian Muslim throughout the Moghul centuries, culture was Indo-Persian and literature was the Persian. The centuries-old contact is now lost, leaving us in a vacuum, without our classics. Translation in Bengali of Rumi (notably by Kazi Akram Husain), Hafiz (by Dr. Shahidullah and others) and Omar Khayyum are mostly poor in literary merit and are no substitute for the original. More recently, Iqbal has suffered from our attempts to get him naturalised ; still the joint endeavour of F. Ahmed, S. A. Ahsan and Abul Husain to introduce Iqbal proceeds from the desire to effect a literary rehabilitation. Translations by Abul Husain have a special value. Besides the felicity of his renderings, they are valuable since they reveal those non-messianic aspects of Iqbal which receive less attention.

The publication of the volume of translations from Iqbal is an important cultural event, and the renderings of Farrukh Ahmed and Abul Husain have set high standards in this field, probably the highest so far. They have proved once again that only good poets can be good translators though good poets

are not necessarily good translators. They have also emphasised the need of strengthening our poets' linguistic equipment if we are to avoid the suspicion that a translation from a translation may, in the process, deviate too much from the original. Compare, for instance, the opening lines of *Asrar-i-Khudi* as translated by Farrukh Ahmed and by Syed Ali Ahsan, or *Shahin* as translated by the former and by Abul Husain, and the suspicion may appear to be a legitimate one.

If the desire to revive the Indo-Iranian literary tradition (with its strong Islamic content) is the mark of the first group of our poets, then the mark of the other group is to write within the Bengali tradition of the last hundred years or so. This grouping is merely for the sake of convenience, and implies no general similarity of style between poets as diverse as Abul Husain, Ahsan Habib, Sanaul Huq and Shamsur Rahman. No grouping can avoid a certain amount of overlapping, or excludes the possibility of equally satisfactory grouping on quite other principles. Since I see the question of tradition as the foremost question for our poets at present, I have classified them on the basis of their attitude to this. Coming to the second group, the diversity may be found to be as marked as in the case of the half a dozen poets who initiated the first notable post-Tagorian movement. There is hardly anything common between Abul Husain's dry, joyless satire and Habib's long-winded melancholy and self-pity. Even in his satires, Habib is not free from the strain of sentimentality, refreshingly absent from Abul Husain. Equally marked is the difference between Husain's economy and bare style (he moves freely in his short lines) and Habib's elaboration and care for verbal melody where he resembles Farrukh. Abul Husain's kinship is with Bishnu Dey, and remotely with the early Eliot ; the spare, allusive style is a recent phenomenon in Bengali, and of the few poets having this gift, Abul Husain is one. Habib's distinction lies in his finding in his later verses, a new idiom for describing a bitterly ironic view of the world. Much of the ornamentation of the early verse seems to be gone, and the style acquires a hardness and edge which brings him nearer Abul Husain, but shows him nearer still to Samar Sen, the master of free-verse and irony.

Similarly, between Sanaul Huq and Shamsur Rahman there is hardly any common ground. Sanaul Huq can come out of himself very easily and has a sense of humour which comes from detachment. His fancy plays on many facets of life and experience and he enjoys living. He has considerable metrical resourcefulness too, as is clear from the poems of *Nadi O Manusher Kabita*. Shamsur Rahman on the contrary gives the impression of living in his Inferno and he goes on writing endlessly on his personal situation,—a poet's tormented loneliness in a dark and insensitive world.

Unlike Eliot Shamsur Rahman has not peopled this Hell with his Prufrocks, and Sweeneys but remains its sole inhabitant. His early poetry was the poetry of langour which could be traced back to Ahsan Habib, and further back to Jibanananda Das. Its imagery was vague. Of late, his verse has become more sinewy and has gained in flexibility. It is now a competent vehicle of intensely and personally felt thought. This gain in strength seems to be the result of the diminishing influence of Jibanananda, replaced by the

invigorating contact with Sudhin Datta. The compactness of that fine poem *Apangteya* is the result of this new influence, of which the diction, too, bears testimony.

This much similarity there is among the poets of this second group that they are all aware of the value of words. In the case of Shamsur Rahman, an increasing command over words seems to have kept pace with an increasing complexity of thought. For a poet to have mastered the language of passionate thinking is one of the last achievements and Shamsur Rahman is very near achieving it. Sanaul Huq, having neither the pale cast of thought whicn is Ahsan Habib's nor the tormented soul of Shamsur Rahman, has nevertheless a preference for thought, as opposed to pure lyric sensationalism. His moods are usually reposeful, and he writes on every-day experiences in words that do not come like torrents, but show ease and workmanship in their selection and ordering.

It will be a memorable day when Shamsur Rahman, now in the strong toils of subjectivism, can free himself and gain the detachment which seems so natural in Sanaul Huq, one of the few poets who can be fanciful and occasionally witty. His (S. Rahman's) capacity for suffering remains his great asset and here neither Farrukh nor Habib approaches him. With the former, suffering is not personal, it leads to indignation and social passion.

Obaidullah Khan's slender volume of poems created a stir, and rightly so. An admirer of A. E. Housman, some of whose poems he has translated, he has the Housman qualities of economy, composure and lyric grace, perhaps the Housman pathos too. Some of Khan's poems read like 'chhara', a traditional verse-form, if it can be called a form which defies all metrical rules. The essence of 'chhara' lies in its image riot and its comic spirit, and Annada Sankar Roy, in his *Urki Dhaner Murki* and *Ranga Dhaner Khai* comes as near to it as possible. A 'chhara' is light verse, and Obaidullah's verses are light only in weight, and not in spirit ; he has more pathos than wit ; there is more irony than sparkle.

The distinctive thing here is the fine texture of these poems, but his verse is too slight for the full utterance of a poet if he is aiming at that. A verse form which necessitates an extremely selective vocabulary, because most of the words do not fit in, can have only a limited utility, and one would expect Obaidullah not to be tied down to the kind of verse he has written to such fine effect. Habibur Rahman, Ashraf Siddiqui and Mazharul Islam have been on the literary scene for quite some time, but it is difficult to place them since none of them has developed a distinctive style, though Ashraf Siddiqui comes nearest to it. The first is almost exclusively a sonneteer, using the form as a dull mechanic uses his tool. Ashraf Siddiqui's poetry, generally speaking, owes its origin to the memory of others' poetry of which the poet does not seem to be conscious. It has a false glitter on the surface, but in all his poems, the basic logical structure is missing. Grappling with any of them is a despairing job ; one never finds a sense of direction and the end is so often bathetic. This, I hope will be borne out if one will examine any two or three poems either from the *Taleb Master* volume or from tbe *Bishkanya* volume. One may examine, from the latter volume, a poem called 'Nator, 1361' and

see how shocking can be the vulgarisation of a justly famous poem, in this case Jibanananda's *Banalata Sen.* I mention these three poets, and I could add another two or three as it seems that they represent the average quality of poetry in East Pakistan. It is usually in the average poetry that the trends of a particular period are more clearly reflected. It would appear that a large part of our poetry is being written no longer in stanzaic forms, but either in free verse or poems of unequal lines, with or without rhyme, that the strain of diluted romanticism persists, that a mild form of social awareness characterises much of this poetry, and that compared to the poetry of the previous generation of Muslim poets, notably Shahadat Husain and Benazir Ahmed, the declamatory and jingling verse has given way to a less rhetorical, and less organised verse.

For these poets there is no dominating influence, and they have assimilated neither Tagore, who is a complete education by himself—nor the half a dozen poets who first became prominent in the thirties. Jibanananda, indeed, has had some influence, but he is one of the most difficult poets to profit by, since his language is the most specialised and weak poets usually fall in the trap of his peculiar verse movement. Compared to the poetry of West Bengal, the average East Bengal poet seems to be at least thirty years behind in technical accomplishment and this is due to his having neglected the essential poetic education. Practically all leading West Bengal poets belong simultaneously to the tradition of his own literature, and that of the literature of Europe, through his close association with English literature. Of the seven or eight poets of the front rank, about five or six are fine English scholars, besides being close students of their own literature. Eliot, and the poets whom Eliot values have left their mark on Bengali poetry. Most of Eliot and much of French symbolist poetry has been translated. Qualities like compression, allusiveness, internal rhyming, assonance, dissonance, bold use of images, and symbolism owe their origin directly to our poets' loving study of European poetry. There is no denying the fact that Bengali poetry has gained immensely in precision, hardness, and expressiveness through this vital contact with an alien tradition and this is nothing new. It goes back to the days when Madhusudan first opened the channel between the two streams, and to-day, as I have already indicated, the tradition of Bengali poetry is half European.

So we are back to the point where we started, the question of tradition. Writing within tradition is the privilege of the trained mind, and to do so is the duty of, and the challenge to, the modern poet, irrespective of his writing in East or West Bengal. Most of the East Bengal poets do not seem to be aware of the deficiencies of our poetry, some of which I have indicated, namely, lack of precision, hardness, compactness, structure and heredity. Much of of our poetry is technically floppy, and woolly in sentiment. Much of it is cloyingly personal. Most of it bears no relation to any thought or art movement. Our average poets are all in a rut and are therefore content to write provincial poetry. It all comes to this, that we are not sufficiently rooted in tradition, and if it is objected that this is begging the question I would say that the two concepts of tradition of which I have spoken are by no means contradictory. Indeed an integration of the Bengali

tradition with the Indo-Iranian would be the ideal thing, not of course, to the exclusion of our European heritage. Provincial poetry is the result of inbreeding, and to counter the malady, cross fertilisation is the answer. Our poets' mental background has to be sufficiently enriched if their poetry is to be at the fore of our literature, and not in backwaters. At present the tribal stamp is too deep on it. We are awaiting the poet who will 'purify the dialect of the tribe'.

Alauddin Al-Azad

I CONSIDER, to begin with, Mr. Siddiqui's division of poets into two groups solely on the basis of their conception of tradition, a rather arbitrary oversimplification.

The question of tradition became important for reasons political rather than poetic. To quote from a protagonist of tradition : "In our literature we should, for the sake of the stability of the State, look for the expression of new values and ideas. At the same time it is true that we are ready even to give up Tagore, if it becomes necessary, for maintaining cultural and national integrity. For us national integrity is more important than literature. Few among us today indulge in literature for the sake of literature only. In the present circumstances, we cannot afford to ignore our political feelings. Great literature does not exhaust itself in aesthetic creation alone. In the field of literature our heritage lies in the current traditions of Islam, in the innumerable unpolished puthis, folk-ballads and songs. Some narrative poems based on them have already been written. We expect many more in the future. Even if they come through conscious efforts, they are welcome, because genuine literature will one day emerge out of them." (Syed Ali Ahsan)

This is probably the most representative view of those who believe in tradition.

Ideological conviction may be congenial to the growth of literature. But we must remember that such convictions can never be forcibly superimposed; they must grow from within. Only Hitler's Germany could think of producing planned literature with the idea of inculcating in the Germans a conviction about the superiority of their Aryan blood. Fortunately for us our country has not reached such a stage. In any case, can propaganda literature add real strength to the state ? This, therefore, does not convincingly explain why a poet should necessarily submerge himself, as some of our poets are trying to do, in the history of Islam and the legends and myths of Arabia and Persia. If you think, that going back to the traditions is necessary for the enrichment of poetry, why should you grudge the poet the liberty to cull his material from whatever quarter he thinks fit.

Given that freedom, a poet will consider Arabian and Persian history and myths valuable for precisely the same reasons as make Egyptian, Indian and Greek myths valuable. The contemporary East Pakistani poet cannot think of giving up Tagore, let alone the whole of Bengali literature, because he knows that he will not be able to rise above the history of Bengali literature; that history will always remain present, and unavoidably so, behind the language, the technique, the metre he uses. How, then, one may ask, will East Pakistani literature acquire a distinct character? The answer is that ours is a separate state possessing a distinct geographical and spiritual identity which is bound to be reflected in literature gradually. Besides, our language has its own peculiarities.

This is the reason why I consider a division of the poets solely on the basis of their conception of tradition both unsatisfactory and unjustified.

Our contemporary poets can, I feel, be divided into three groups : (a) the Revivalists (b) the Impressionists and (c) the Neo-existentialists.

The first group believe in making their poetry fit in with the ideology of the state. They are, at once, idealists and romantics in as much as they aspire to enliven the present by resuscitating the glories of the past. Mr. Siddiqui was right in considering Farrukh Ahmed the most prominent among them. Farrukh is prominent because he has deep religious feelings and is very prolific too. Farrukh Ahmed's individuality lies in the fact that his emotions are centred in his conception of the ideal State and the ideal way of life. His *Shat Shagarer Majhi* which was published just before the establishment of Pakistan, is marked by romanticism; *Sirajam Munira* is full of religious and moral principles.

A feeling of frustration born of the growing suspicion that his ideals are unrealisable has forced Farrukh Ahmed to take to the writing of satire latterly. *Nasihatnama* and *Tasbirnama* are cases in point.

Talim Husain's pan-Islamism is innocent and his style is rather conventional. Muffakkharul Islam is crude and does not seem to have realised the truth that an arbitrary agglomeration of Arabic and Persian words alone does not make poetry. Two other poets of this group whom Mr. Siddiqui mentioned do not deserve any attention at all. What is important about this group is the fact that its artificial vitality has already exhausted itself and has, since their ideals have no relevance to modern times, failed to establish itself as a heritage for the future poets.

Ahsan Habib, who comes foremost among the poets of the second group faces a crisis similar to Farrukh's. Since 1947 he has not offered us any notable work. True, he did not, unlike Farrukh Ahmed, write a *Sirajam-Munira*, but he too has produced a few satires. This proves that although different in nature he and Farrukh are arriving at the same culmination. Whether Abul Husain has any consistently developed attitude towards life is a question difficult to answer. He shows a tendency to criticise the conventional values. But his negative attitude smacks of monotony and has probably resulted in his poetic silence. Sanaul Huq is comparatively more familiar with reality, but he lacks some of the primary qualities of modernity. Shamsur Rahman has, of late, outgrown the influence of Jibanananda, but has, at the same time,

entrenched himself in a gulf of introversion which is not congenial to the progress of poetry.

I come, finally, to those whom the writer completely ignores. And he would, I imagine, had he included them in his study, probably have called them neo-existentialists. These neo-existentialists believe in the exposition of social truth, and adhere, therefore, to classicism. On the other hand, they are also leftists.

Most of the poets hitherto discussed with the exception of one or two, lack some of the essential elements that constitute modernity in poetry. Mr. Siddiqui has rightly pointed out that modern Bengali poetry has its origin in the attempts made to outgrow the mighty influence of Tagore. This new poetry bears clear marks of the influence of post-war English poetry and of the French symbolists. This poetry is anti-romantic, complex, analytical and objective. It is the group I have called neo-existentialist who are modern from this point of view.

I believe we can arrive at some general conclusions :

(a) Like our society our poetry also suffers from a lack of balance. We have yet to develop a coherent sense of values. Writing in the same period of history, one poet turns to the old language, while another uses the most modern diction. What is really deplorable is the fact that the former is usually more widely acclaimed than the latter. This acts as a hindrance to the healthy growth of modern poetry.

(b) I agree with Mr. Siddiqui that most of our poets are idealists and they keep themselves confined within the limits of nationalism. That makes our poetry narrow in scope.

(c) Our poets are usually reluctant to take the necessary trouble to make poetry precise and artistic. This reluctance affects the quality of our poetry. The East Pakistani poets should be more painstaking.

(d) Finally, comes the question of diction. Words do not, as Mallarme thinks they do, make poetry by themselves. Poetry consists in the happy marriage between ideas and language. The question of diction need not, or rather should not, therefore, be treated as something separate. Those who are trying to adopt Arabic and Persian words and the language of the puthis are trying to do something artificial.

SATIRE

Nurul Momen

WHAT is a satire ? One may reasonably ask, but one may as reasonably be disappointed to be told that it does not bear a definition—because in a definition humour, irony, wit and satire get mixed up.

The search for a definition has however led to confusion. It is worth while to give a sample of this confusion before any attempt to get out of it is seriously made. The ingredients, according to Dr. Johnson, appear to be "acrimony of censure, elegance of praise, artful delineation of character, variety and vigour of sentiment, happy turns of language, and pleasing harmony of numbers." According to Moliere a satire is "to correct the vices of men while amusing them."

Chamber's Encyclopedia sets out conditions which inspire the creation of satire. "It emerges from sheer denunciation by the mingling of wit or imagination with reproof and it occurs whenever normality (conscious of its own rightness) mocks at sub-normality". In other words, "its aim is to wound the offender by destroying his self-esteem and so to amend him, and it increases with force by appealing to the indignation or laughter of other normal men."

Hugh Walker in his work, *English Satire and Satirists*, contributes immensely to the understanding of satire by pointing out the difficulty of it, and after a learned discourse, giving up the attempt at a definition. But he showed in the attempt such a fruitful confusion that one is easily persuaded to believe that the way out lies in what he ultimately says : no amount of study will teach what satire is ; "that is to be learnt from a consideration of the acknowledged masters—such masters as Aristophanes, Horace, Juvenal, Voltaire and Cervantes, and in English, Dryden, Pope and Swift, Burns and Byron."

A writer may be a satirist by nature. Juvenal and Dr. Johnson belong to this group. So does Voltaire of France. At a quite lower level, Iswar Gupta and Pramatha Nath Bishi in Bengali literature may be said to have affinities with this group.

A satirist reacts to the happenings around him and chooses to correct men and society by holding them up to ridicule. Cervantes, Moliere, Anatole France, Voltaire, Dryden, Pope, Swift, Lewis Caroll, Jerome K. Jerome, Bernard Shaw, and George Orwell in England, Mark Twain in the USA, and, at none too low a level, Bankim Chandra, Sukumar Roy Chowdhury and Parshuram in Bengali literature, are satirists in this sense.

Satire must have for its purpose the amendment of the conduct of individuals or of the vices of society. Therefore morals and manners form the province in which a satirist works. And by a method of accentuation, which has to be a form of exaggeration, the satirist brings into bolder relief the deficiencies in this regard. The characters and situations, therefore, must show some abnormalities. By the creation of normal characters the satirist will fail to put the intended emphasis on the deficiency he likes to accentuate and to carry the audience with him, because the audience conscious of their

being 'normal men' look forward to seeing the deficiency shown in an abnormal form with a touch of ridicule, so that they can mock and laugh at it more easily.

If the greatest satires of the world, such as *Don Quixote*, *Penguin Island*, *the Rape of the Lock*, *Absalom and Achitophel*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Way of All Flesh* are analysed, they will all show these ingredients in them. The tendency to exaggerate folly and vice in order to ridicule them would seem universal.

Satire, therefore, being truth distorted to bring about the intended effect, is very exacting as a form of literature ; and it is no wonder if we hear Hugh Walker say : "Satire is a relatively low form of literature just because it embodies a relatively low form of truth". Humour itself is a lower form of art.

In a sense Walker is right but works of great literary value may be based on a low form of truth if the author sees it "in the light of universal and permanent tendencies in human nature". And the art of satire is such a difficult art that it has to succeed like success ; that is, if it just fails to be satire it may be anything—an inferior kind of farce, invective or sarcasm.

The history of humour in Bengali literature is traceable to the sixteenth century. The earlier masters whose writings showed a marked sense of the ludicrous were Mukunda Ram Chakrabarty, creator of Bharudutta (16th century), Bharat Chandra, author of *Bidya Shundar* (17th century), Tekchand Thakur (*Alaler Gharer Dulal*), Rangalal and Biharilal (19th century). Satire as a distinctly recognizable motif is evident in the works of Madhusudan Dutta, Dina Bandhu Mitra and Jagabandhu, all of whom belonged to the nineteenth century.

Bankimchandra also had the makings of a satirist in him. His *Lokrahashya*, *Kamalakanto* and *Muchi Ram Gurer Jiban Charit* are brilliant works of satire in Bengali.

That his writings overwhelmed his contemporaries is borne out by the fact that Musharraf Husain took to writing satire in the style of Bankim. His *Gazi Miar Bastani* was modelled on Bankim's *Kamalakanto*.

I have not named Rabindra Nath Tagore earlier but nonetheless his name has been all the time in my mind. He is a satirist in the sense in which Byron is one. What one critic has said about Byron's *Vision of Judgment* may well apply to Rabindranath's *Shesher Kabita*. "Byron", the critic says, "who in the 18th century could have been the greatest of satirists, is hurried by the spirit of his age into passion and description bequeathing however a splendid proof of the possibility of allying satire with sublimity."

Kedar Bandopadhyaya, Probhat Mukhopadhyaya and D. L. Roy deserve attention next, if not as satirists proper, but surely as authors who never spared attacks on social evils through humour. I consider Sukumar Chowdhury also to be a great satirist.

Parshuram (Rajshekhar Basu) is another gifted satirist fit to be recognised internationally. *Kajjali*, *Gaddalika* and *Hanumaner Shwapna* are incomparable works.

Pra Na Bi are the initials of the name of Pramatha Nath Bishi who was inspired by the abbreviation G. B. S. (George Bernard Shaw). He and Annada Sankar Roy are both gifted satirists.

Abul Mansur attracted the attention of the critics by his very first book *Aina* which perhaps still remains his best. It contains mostly satirical sketches. His second book *The Food Conference* was a more ambitious project ; the characters were beasts supposed to be ministers and high officials connected with food problems. They, unlike the characters in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, are however too human to be quite convincing.

Abul Mansur's recent book *Asmani Purda* is disappointing. *Asmani Purda* contains, among other things, a small play of the same name. He should have written a story with the materials of the play. That would have enabled him to utilize his materials better. He might have succeeded even as he did in *Keramat Masterer Ozarati* and *Nimak Haram*. His *Sahi Bara Ozaratnama* written in the stylised language of the puthis makes refreshing reading.

Ebrahim Khan's sense of humour is subtler. His *Nair Patra* is a notable piece of satirical writing.

Mahbubul Alam showed promise as a satirist in his *Momener Jabanbandi*. But I repented having read his *Gope Shandesh*. There is something gross and vulgar about this collection of stories about the Second World War, which annoys and exasperates the reader.

Syed Waliullah, in his *Lal Shalu* satirises the class of knaves who deal in religion by taking advantage of superstitions. In *Bahi Pir*, a play, he showed how an old priest's wife fled from him and was recovered ; but she had fallen in love, in the meantime, with a young man ; ultimately the old priest let her go.

Kazi Din Muhammad and Muhammad Idris Ali, author of *Golakchandrer Atmakatha* also deserve to be mentioned.

Neta O Nari by Gholam Rahman and *Nazar* by Pathik are attempts to write satire in a manner in which one would observe and write about passing shows. And they are nothing more than reports. The bitterness with which the authors write and their failure to reach any level of literary excellence naturally exclude them from the purview of this article.

Anything may be an object of satire, and anybody who reacts to it may write a satire ridiculing it. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in the columns of newspapers regular articles satirizing events and personalities. One writer of such articles, 'Musafir', born quite a few years ago in the columns of the Ittefaq, is still toiling on. By constant practice his writings have now become quite interesting, and his satire quite obvious !

Showkat Osman has written three satirical plays. There is no subtlety in his humour. In *Amlar Mamla*, one of the three plays referred to, he wanted to ridicule the class of people who imitate the English way of living. But the play is weak, and the satire not very effective.

It is actually in the field of satirical poetry that much work has been done.

Ahsan Habib, Farrukh Ahmad, Abul Husain and Abu Zafar Obaidullah Khan have written excellent satirical verse.

Ahsan Habib's poetry is plain and his satire spontaneous. He never satirizes individuals. His attacks are directed against classes. Ahsan Habib is not a prolific writer and his output is very meagre.

The following satirical poems by Ahsan Habib are well executed : *Shandhipatra* (on nepotism), *Bazar* (on dowry), *Prabhushangbad* (on political leaders) and *Janmadin* (Birthday). *Janmadin* is the story of a clerk who was invited by his boss to attend Dolly's birth-day ; he bought chocolates, as present and discovered that Dolly was a dog.

The boss is here held up to ridicule, and the indifference of the rich to the poor thrown into sharp relief. But the reference to tears in the clerk's eyes in the last four lines has, I think, detracted from the poem's value as satire, because the audience is moved to a feeling of pathos in which there is no element of the satirical.

Farrukh Ahmad's satires are direct, vigorous, and aggressive. As a satirist he writes under the pen name of Hayat Daraj Khan Pakistani. Abul Husain makes great use of irony in his satire. His manner is intellectual, and his approach different from that of other satirists. Abu Zafar Obaidullah Khan is the youngest of the East Pakistani satirists. His book *Shatnarir Har* shows great promise.

I have explained earlier that the satirist tries to secure his effects by deliberately accentuating the vices and follies he attacks. It is here that the satirists in East Pakistan appear to fail. Abul Mansur, Showkat Osman Abul Fazal, Mahbubul Alam are powerful writers but they are by and large ineffective as satirists because they allow their attention to be diverted from the main object of satire which is to ridicule vice. Satire, in order to be successful, must be enlivened with wit, must be vigorous, and must aim at balancing the sublime and the ridiculous.

Rashid Karim

THE function of a satirist can be likened to a surgeon's. One welcomes an operation, however painful, when it is necessary. Human society like the human body can seldom be fully healthy or perfect. In all ages and countries there have been social diseases and defects and the literature of the time cannot but reflect these. Even in Shakespeare, Hardy and Dickens, great as are their works, we can see keen flashes of satire. Nevertheless we do not call them satirists because with them satire is not the main object.

What then is satire and who is a satirist ? The true aim of satire is correction. It attacks evils, social and political. It can sometimes even be personal. But it is said that all writers directly or indirectly aim at social reform. What is distinctive about satire then ? All ages and all countries need the doctor but there are certain times when he is needed most desperately. Such was the time of King Charles II in England. Religious controversies, squabbles between Whigs and Tories, a mad struggle for power, raged in the country. That was the background against which a satirist like Dryden worked. According to Dryden satire is reform through ridicule but it has to be refined ridicule. And there's the rub.

The art of satire is handicapped by the fact that the raw material it uses is ugliness and disease. One therefore has to be very careful in wielding this weapon. Otherwise because of the weakness inherent in its very nature there is the great danger of one's violating decency, being vulgar and coarse. That is why even in poets like Dryden and Pope there are often serious lapses of taste.

Before we start our discussion on satire in East Pakistan we must be clear about certain points regarding satire in general.

We must remember that whatever provokes laughter is not satire nor is it always fit material for satire. We must recognise the difference between what is humorous, the merely ludicrous and the satirical.

The smile of a satirist is deceptive and masks his real cruel intentions. Ahsan Habib, who in his *Janmadin* (Birthday) is all smiles throughout, startles us by the revelation that the birthday which was being celebrated was that of a dog.

Furthermore, the satirist must have complete freedom of thought and expression. He must not suffer from any inhibitions himself nor should there be any taboos imposed on him from outside. Otherwise the very purpose of satire will be defeated.

This is why we find our satirists moving in a narrow restricted sphere, the poor priests (Mullahs) being their only butts, as if religious bigots with beards are the only vile things in our country.

Abul Mansur's *Aina* has gained the status of a classic. A powerful writer, he has a graceful prose style and a clear vision. But we cannot overlook the fact that his book is very narrow in scope and even inside those narrow limits his imagination moves haltingly. Most of these satirical stories revolve round the same theme—the hypocrisy of the 'Mullahs'. But it can be said in defence of Mansur that the problem was at least vital in his time, though it has since ceased to be so.

That is why Waliullah's *Bahi Pir* (The Bookish Priest) fails to engage our interest. The character of the priest, who has been made to speak in the language of books, to make him ridiculous, does not carry conviction and is forced and artificial. His *Lal Shalu* (The red cloth), on the same theme, which is not a satire, is a successful creation.

Din Mohammad's *Golak Chandrer Atmakatha* (The Autobiography of Golakchandra) is a discursive account of various experiences lacking in

thematic unity. His jokes fall flat. If crooked, indirect statements are satire then this work is a satire. Din Mohammad very naively mistakes punning and alliteration for satire. For instance his play on the word college and on the words *Pati* and *Khasham* in relation to Maulana Azad is no satire and is childish.

There is a world of difference in quality between the word *Rashtra Khasham* and Dryden's coinage 'Godsmith'. in : "Gods they had tried of every shape and size / That godsmiths could produce or priests devise."

Mahbubul Alam's *Gope Shandesh* simply stinks. The third story and, more than that, the fourth, relating in detail the attempt of three American soldiers to rape a man—a rather fat feminine man—is revolting. Very few will ever be able to surpass Mr. Alam in obscenity.

Nurul Momen's *Rupantar* (Metamorphosis) is rich in skilful dialogue and easy humour and is undoubtedly the best among the few plays written in East Pakistan. The play somehow reminds one of Tagore's *Chirakumar Shabha* (The Bachelor's Assembly) and suffers in comparison. To me *Rupantar* seems to be more a comedy than a satire. As a satire its scope is extremely narrow.

His *Nemesis*, a good work, can by no means be called a satire however much the author may want it to be so described.

Showkat Osman is a powerful writer but he is not a conscious, careful artist. His *Amlar Mamla* (All about Bureaucrats) and *Tashkar O Lashkar* (Robbers and Soldiers) are weak satires. They are instances of his weakness for alliteration and assonance—scarcely anything more than that.

In mock imitation of the inimitable style of Pramatha Chowdhury, Showkat Osman once wrote a wonderful satire. His more recent story *Matsya* (Fish) is another delightful work. His occasional limericks are particularly corrosive in their effect. Lines like : "She is a highly respectable lady, who goes about veiled. / She has three paramours" : often remind us of Byron. It seems rather strange that the author of these and of *Amlar Mamla* and *Tashkar O Lashkar* is the same person. Neither Mr. Akhunji nor Shoheb is a convincing character. Akhunji talks and behaves like a puppet. The same is the case with Shoheb. All the characters and situations are unnatural. So the satire lacks point.

In my opinion Obaidul Huq, uptil now a rather unnoticed author of not too many works, which include *Ai Parke* (In this Park), *Digbijoyee Chorabazar* (The All-conquering Black market) is one of our major satirists.

In his *Ai Parke* he has created a number of successful characters by a few skilful touches. This satirical tragedy of the lower middle class to whom their job is all hits the mark.

His *Chena Manusher Katha* (Tales of Known Faces), a collection of stories satirising the bigwigs of society, is refreshing.

Mohiuddin Ahmed also has written a few satires in prose. Gholam Rahman's claim to the title of satirist is rather questionable.

Ahsan Habib's *Janmadin* (The Birthday) has already been mentioned. The poverty of the middle class to which the author belongs is for him no laughing matter. Nevertheless as all other avenues of entertainment are shut one can as well have some amusement at one's own expense. But the laughter only ill conceals the tears. In his *Kono Badsha Jadir Prati* (To a Princess) and elsewhere he very pointedly reveals the meaninglessness of festivities like weddings for the poor. It seems Ahsan Habib in his satires is more concerned with material than with spiritual poverty.

The same consciousness of oppression and poverty is found also in Abul Husain. But he refuses to take things lying down ; he wishes evil to be combated. His poetry has a rare distinction. His lines are sometimes allusive, full of echoes from other poets.

The author of the poems *Udbhat, Chagmari Sangeet, Ghughu* prefers to write under various pseudonyms. None dare say his comments on present-day social and political events in Pakistan are tame or lack vehemence.

Farrukh Ahmed also has written some satires characterised by skilful workmanship. Abu Zafar Obaidullah's output is small but he has undoubtedly opened up a new avenue by putting the old medium of nursery rhymes to new use. He has the rare poetic power of suggesting a lot in a very few words. Apparently sweet and lilting, they sometimes burn and blaze or are very often heavy with tears.

To sum up, I have tried to assess the value of the works mentioned here as satire. I cannot but notice certain deficiencies. Many of our writers do not have any clear notion of what satire means, what is its material and scope. They confuse humour with satire, and the merely farcical. They have often mistaken punning and alliteration and indirect statements for satire.

Their scope is so narrow that it seems they have not been able to free themselves from inhibitions or conquer taboos. Their writings are so weak that we cannot say of them like Voltaire : "The pen is mightier than the sword." They have taken up as objects of satire petty, insignificant defects, neglecting major vices and hence have failed to do any lasting good. They often lack in systematic thinking and have no first hand knowledge of their subjects. What they have in plenty is bad taste.

No doubt there are some exceptions and I think due tribute has been paid to them in my paper.

SENTIMENTALISM IN BENGALI LITERATURE

Abul Husain

THE territory now called Pakistan did not suddenly rise from the ocean. It is a new name given to an old people and an old country, which both had an existence before August 14, 1947. Ours is a new State but an old literature.

It may be worth one's while to pause and look back and consider what headway we have made in the field of literature during these eleven years after independence.

This is of course easier said than done. For a writer to judge the works of his contemporaries is never an easy matter, because he is so near them and so involved in their problems that the effort baffles him, and he cannot form an objective perspective. I must begin by saying that qualitatively our contemporary literature is still in its teens.

Now, this sort of statement does leave a bad taste in one's mouth, but truth to tell, all our literary efforts over the past seventyfive years, have been inspired by Hindu society. Only two Muslim authors, Mir Musharraf Husain and Qazi Nazrul Islam have contributed something in recent times which can reasonably be expected to endure the test of time, but neither of them is completely free from Hindu influence. You can trace this influence in Mir Musharraf Husain's language, which is Bankim Chandra all the way. You find the same cultural impact in his *Gazi Miar Bostani* which immediately reminds you of Bankim's *Kamalakanter Daptar*. Nazrul Islam was of course a greater literary figure. The influence of Hindu culture is not so patent in Nazrul Islam. But a discerning reader will see in his writings the influence of Satyendranath, Rabindranath and Mohitlal Majumdar. Nazrul Islam spontaneously responded to the national and freedom movements which originated in Bengal. What seems surprising is the fact that the Khilafat Movement had left Nazrul Islam cold, although it roused the whole of Muslim India. One may cite poems like *Kamal Pasha*, *Anwar Pasha*, *Chiranjib Jaglul* in refutation of my statement. But these poems really were inspired by Indian Nationalism—the nationalism of which the parent was the Indian National Congress. The less we talk about Kaikobad the better. He is an epic poet only by courtesy. He wrote his *Maha Shashan Kabya* in the early twentieth century but it is not comparable with Madhusudan's works, which preceded Kaikobad's by nearly half a century. It is a pale shadow even by the side of Hem's and Nabin's imitations. The only exception we can think of is Jasimuddin. Jasimuddin's writings are like nothing that has ever been written before. He stands alone, making full use of the almost-forgotten folk literature, and the ballads of Mymensingh. In my opinion nowhere else can one find the stamp of Bengali culture so unmistakably and so completely as in Jasimuddin's poetry. Jasimuddin is the epitome of the spirit of Bengal, but he is little else.

What we call modern Bengali literature is the work of Michael, Bankim, Rabindranath, Saratchandra and Nazrul Islam. The predominant features of their writings have an entirely English origin. The names of Michael, Bankim and Rabindranath recall such names as Milton, Scott, Shelley and Tennyson, associating the latter with the former. Any English knowing Bengali reader will tell you this. Our writers learnt the art of writing as apprentices to the English novelists and poets. And yet we can see no influence of Dryden, Pope, Defoe, Swift or Donne anywhere throughout the length and breadth of Bengali literature. No trace even of Shakespeare whom we are never tired of extolling to the skies in our schools and colleges. The English are known for their love of truth and realism, their sense of humour, knowledge of things, and their love of principles. The Bengalis are, hardly known for any of these. The essence of the European Renaissance was humanism, but it made no impression on Bengali literature. Chandidas's famous dictum that Man is the end-all and be-all of everything could win only lip service from the Bengalis.

The clarity, sense of proportion, a general knowledge of form and technique, the emphasis on intellect and discipline which we notice in the classics, could find no adherent among the Bengali writers. The middle class sentiments which are so prominent in the plays of Steele, or the picture of domestication which characterizes the works of Richardson, how these came to influence Bengali writers, I will never know. The puritanic ostentation of the Victorian era greatly impressed the mind of Bengal. Fancy started plàying a more vital role than truth. How one speaks was of greater concern than what one says. Whether a piece of writing was realistic or not ceased to matter, what concerned them all was whether or not it conformed to a certain notion of morality. In short, literature lost all contact with life and became a product of wild sentimentalism. Our authors emulated Wordsworth and Tennyson, and eschewed Browning. It is worth while investigating to what extent the work of the Christian missionaries of Bengal in the nineteenth century was responsible for a mental background like this. But it is difficult to believe that foreign influence alone shaped the Begali mind in this manner.

For all I know, there is something mysterious about the physical features of Bengal, something which has made us imaginative. What a magnificent struggle do we see each day on the mighty Padma between man and hostile Nature ! Chances are that the river will swallow him. The constant apprehension of death causes him to attach very little significance to the life on this side the grave. East Pakistan's folk songs are full of self-pity and sentimentalism but they do not sing the glory of life.

Nature's influence has inevitably made us sentimental, fanciful and temperamental. The slightest provocation will afflict our minds. Criticism would deeply hurt us—no matter who the critic is—a friend or a foe. It is amazing how small and big things equally agitate our minds, and how energetically we eke out trifles. The film operator makes a slight error, but the howl of protest you hear from the audience is out of all proportion. We are not above murdering if the outcome of a sports event is not what we desire. What we lack is a sense of proportion. Utter lack of balance characterizes our actions and reactions. Well, this is Bengali character.

This kind of emotive conduct has done us harm in more ways than one. But the sphere where its effect has been calamitous is literature. Our poetry is far too sweet. Our prose is not sufficiently virile. Our poetry is a balloon of sentiments. Our fiction is full of events which are calculated to bring tears to our eyes—these are events which have no other purpose, and are highly improbable. Even Rabindranath's poetry gives us ample evidence of the extent to which sentimentalism can vitiate one's imagination. I will not refer to *Nirjharer Shwapnabhanga* because it is one of his early poems. But take *Manash Shundari*, a later creation, which is also a specimen of excessive sentimentalism.

This kind of emotion is natural to a teen-ager who is in love. But we all know that in a teenager's love there is more of sentimentality than of depth. *Manash Shundari* is a long poem, and unnecessarily so. Here the poet talks too much and says too little.

It was not from the early Tagore we learnt brevity. We had to wait for a much maturer Tagore to learn this.

Tagore had a habit of stating a commonplace with a great deal of solemnity as though it was something profound. This, of course, spoilt the habit of all others who imitated him—and who didn't ? Perhaps it was the lyrical quality of his genius which was responsible for this. His *Barshamangal* is a case in point. One likes the sound of the words used in it. This poem also gives you a succession of images, but they are all monotonous. This leads one to suspect if the sentiments expressed in the poem are genuine.

The sentimentality of *Shesher Kabita* is contagious. It is to be expected that a love story will have a lot of emotion in it. The poetical excesses of Amit, the hero, are understandable but to twist the proceedings of the tale in order to bring about a change in the hero's outlook, seems not a natural device. It would appear that originally the poet's intention was to depict a character who would appear ridiculous and amusing, but before the story got into its stride the poet's attitude towards this man completely changed ; what was intended to be a clown, ended up by being the blue-eyed boy of its creator. The metamorphosis was brought about by Nibaran Chakrabarty whose chief delight was to satirise Tagore. Tagore had to write a great deal of poetry on behalf of Nibaran Chakrabarty and the poetry became such an obsession with him that the barrister Amit became the lover Amit. While the effect was intended to be ironical, in point of fact, it became poetical. Thus the result was neither poetry nor irony.

But of course, Sarat Chandra beats them all. Read any novel by this author and you will know that the concubines are not concubines, they are the chastest of women, scrupulously performing their religious rites and would not touch even water while travelling in a train, as that would undermine their religion. All his heroes are morality minded debauchees. You can take any instance from his writings to be convinced of this, but let us think of *Debadas*, a peerless piece of sentimental writing. The circumstances of the hero's love for Parbati are such that the reader feels a spontaneous sympathy for him. But that can be no excuse for permitting the memories of a futile love to haunt him to the end of his life so relentlessly, and in a manner

which made every other value of life seem inane. This is no example of a healthy life or of a robust love. The tragedy of Debdas's life is artificial and contrived, and the way he brought about his self-destruction would suggest that he derived a sadistic pleasure from it. He seemed determined not to go back to a normal useful life. Parbati was no more his, therefore, what he did, what happened to him, did not matter. Chandramukhi's devotion, friends' affection, the wide open world, everything was reduced to nothingness by the signle fact of his not being able to marry Parbati. This story, built around a perverse notion of love, has caused many tears to drop, but of course, it nauseates the adult reader.

Nazrul Islam appeared like a meteor on the horizon. He had the banner of revolt in his hand, and made his intentions pretty clear. It did not matter if the main theme of the rebellion was something trifling, but it did cause a tremendous lot of din and fuss. Bengalis who had seen nothing like this before, responded like a war-horse hearing the bugle. Thus Nazrul Islam walked straight into the hearts of his readers. Only one other writer had known such immediate success : Saratchandra. The secret of the success of them both is the same : sentimentality ; the one thing which never fails to conquer a Bengali reader. It is not for nothing that no other author has become so popular as these two in recent times. The wave of nationalism reached the shores of Bengal in the thirties of the present century, but it became something quite different, something like anarchy, in the writings of the romantic Bengali authors. Nazrul Islam's poetry is understandable only against this background. It is true that Nazrul Islam's writings contributed to this general mood of rebellion and restlessness, but it is also undeniable that the poet himself was a product of this atmosphere. There is not, therefore, much depth of feeling or flight of imagination in his poetry : what we find there is the appeal of sentimentalism. To Wordsworth, poetry was "emotion recollected in tranquillity." There is no such tranquillity in Nazrul Islam.

As long as emotion obeys the dictates of reason, it is conducive to good poetry. But when it exceeds those limits, it degrades literature.

Nazrul Islam often loses the sequence of his thoughts when he deviates from his theme, as he often does, in order to use a favourite word although it is wholly out of tune ; he also sacrifices his meaning in order to accommodate a certain metre or to give expression to a sudden upsurge of emotion. What precisely the poet is trying to express in his famous poem *Bidrohi* (The Rebel) is not so clear ; in it he has made only one intention clear, which is to defy everything. This may be the restiveness of youth. How did the last two lines of the poem "I will rest if only the cry of the oppressed no longer rends the sky ; and if the clink of the tyrant's weapons is heard no more in the savage battle field" manage to infiltrate into *Bidrohi*, one will never know. This pious desire has absolutely nothing to do with the mood of the rest of the poem, and certainly does not stem from it. The reader therefore suspects that the poet suddenly thought of a couple of beautiful lines and could not resist the temptation of incorporating them into the poem, without regard to the fact that these lines are obtrusive and do not fit in.

I know I am now treading on dangerous ground. Let philosophers decide whether it is desirable that a man who has gone out for a drug should return home in time with it, or whether it is just as well that he forgets all about his errand when he suddenly beholds a rainbow in the sky. If you ask me, it is just as sentimental for you to be moonstruck while on your way to a drug store, as it is to think about an ailing son while you are looking for a spot of nature. It was in the nineteenth century that emotion came to be recognized as an essential element of poetry. I am referring to nineteenth century English literature. That intellect could also be an element of poetry was not known to the Victorians. This is true not only in relation to twentieth century poetry ; even seventeenth century poetry subordinated emotion to imagination and experience. In modern poetry, one may say, emotion has no place at all. The poet's purpose is to communicate his experience to the reader. And this is achieved not by the medium of sentiment but by such qualities as imaginativeness, wealth of meaning, beauty of description and originality of technique. The clarity of his thought and the flight of his imagination are means by which he unlocks the heart of the reader.

If you judge the quality of our efforts during the past eleven years from this particular standpoint, you will at once know where the deficiency lies. Our poetry is far too sweet and little else. Our theme is blatantly sentimental and totally devoid of any ideas. You only have to read Gholam Mostafa's elegy on the death of the Quaid-e-Azam to see how unspeakably sentimental the poem is. It is true that the death of the Quaid-e-Azam is the greatest misfortune of our national life. It is only natural that our sense of loss at his death will find spontaneous expression and disturb us emotionally. But in this poem it found expression in such a manner that it failed to be poignant. The depth of the feeling has been lost in the labyrinth of repetitiveness. Consider these lines. "All the elements of Nature are proclaiming this single fact, he is gone, he is no more". As if this was not enough, the poet had to add further, "A cloud from the Western sky meets her sister in the Eastern Horizon, embraces her, and bursts into tears." This poem appeared in Bulbulistan, otherwise it would be difficult to recognize it as Gholam Mostafa's.

Shahadat Husain is a classical poet. His language is as ornate as Michael's. Sentimentalism is therefore to be least expected in his poetry. And of course, he has not allowed himself to be carried away by sentiment to the extent Gholam Mostafa has done. His failing is a weakness for certain words. He has used words just because they sound good, without considering whether they have anything to convey in the given context.

In *Zinda Pakistan*, the line "The Sky leaves its message on the blue pandal," is to me unintelligible. The poet has apparently used the words for the sake of the words. The poet momentarily forgot that words are intended to convey something.

I have already told you that the one poet whose writings breathe the spirit of Bengal is Jasimuddin. Thus it is only to be expected that Jasimuddin's writings will have more than their due share of sentimentalism, because sentimentalism is an essential trait of the Bengali character. Take

for instance the well-known *Kabar*. The Bengali readers found in this poem sufficient material over which they could shed tears, and of course, a poem which causes the reader to weep cannot but be real ! How many among us have paused to think that the emotions expressed in the poem lead us nowhere. This kind of sentiment becomes only an old man who has one foot in the grave, else what justification is there for being obsessed by the memory of a succession of deaths in the family ? This is no sign of a healthy mind. If it were the poet's intention to communicate the sense of tragedy which accompanies the death of dear ones, it was not necessary for him to describe a succession of deaths, especially as these various deaths are so identical that they do not lend to his poetry any special significance. He says the same thing, whether he is mourning his grandmother's death, or his aunt's or his mother's or sister's. The episode of one single death was not enough for the poet to convey his meaning. That was why he had to tell us about so many deaths !

When we leave Gholam Mostafa, Jasimuddin and Shahadat Husain behind, we come to the period of the moderns. They are all thoroughly familiar with the principles of modern poetry, which of course they have learnt from contemporary English poets. Their chief concern is not to be sentimental. But paradoxically enough, among the recent poets, the more popular are they whose style is slovenly, and thinking chaotic.

Ashraf Siddiqui celebrates the advent of spring, but with what ? With wrong idoms, and with words which occur over and over again.

What beats me hollow is the poverty of the poet's imagination as reflected in lines like these :

> Through successive springs
> Seven long years have passed, Jahanara,
> Do you still stand before the looking glass ?

What really the poet had to say was a very simple thing. It was this. Despite the bumps and blows of life, man has retained his sensitivity, and spring never fails to bring ecstasy to his life. But the way the poet started jabbering in an effort to express this commonplace, made the whole poem a clumsy thing.

Many similar instances could be cited from the writings of our younger poets. A certain amount of emotion is not out of place in poetry but one must be able to see when emotion is reaching the frontiers of sentimentality. Even if one can think of some justification for sentimentality in poetry its obtrusiveness in prose is unpardonable.

Drama is the weakest spot in Bengali literature. We were therefore encouraged when we found that during the years after Independence quite a number of dramas had made their appearance. A drama is intended to be staged ; the reading of the drama is a sort of consumers' surplus. But our plays are seldom seen on the stage. Therefore reading them is the only way to be familiar with them. But one glance through these plays will give you the answer why nobody bothers to stage them.

Showkat Osman has a play called *Amlar Mamla* where the dramatist's intention is to expose the servility of our bureaucratic officers to the English way of life. But really the events of the play revolve round a love-affair. Shoaib is an idealist. He has his eyes on Mushtari, a cousin of his and the daughter of a magistrate. But of course the father of the girl had quite different ideas about his daughter's suitor, who among other things, must be a moneyed man. While the father's relentless opposition was already there, Mushtari discovered that Shoaib was very intimate with another girl called Nargis. This cut her to the quick and she flatly refused to have anything to do with Shoaib. Her marriage was now settled with a different man. The hero then quits the scene, a broken-hearted man.

He is next seen busying himself in all sorts of social welfare activities. It was then that Mushtari recognized her error. She wrote to Shoaib imploring him to come back. And back he comes. Then follows a dreary conversation.

The long and short of this long conversation is that Shoaib cannot agree to rescue Mushtari from the catastrophic marriage settled with another person on the grounds that he is not sufficiently rich, and Mushtari, who has never known what poverty is, cannot be expected to be happy in impoverished conditions. But of course these arguments are nothing but the familiar lovers' quarrel. But still it cannot be explained just as that. Shoaib took long fifteen minutes to explain to Mushtari in all seriousness why it was not desirable that they got married. And it is here that I object. This long harangue is out of all proportion, even when one remembers that it was caused by the fact that Mushtari had once turned down Shoaib, and he was naturally therefore piqued. Wise readers of course begin to suspect that everything is destined to end well, in spite of Shoaib's speechifying. Finally, what all the arguments in the world failed to do was accomplished by tears, which washed away Shoaib's objections. It swung the story in a different direction. The possibilities of drama were buried under sentimentalism.

Let's take another drama, Ashrafuzzaman's *Sailab.* I started reading it with extraordinary interest as it has for its background the floods of East Bengal. But before long I found that the theme was quite different. The Syeds are an aristocratic Zamindar family, but their best days are gone. They are falling fast. The up and coming people are the Mirs, a family of businessmen. They are rolling in money, their children are going to schools and colleges. But these alone do not give them status. A clash with the Syeds becomes inevitable. In point of fact, this conflict is between decadent feudalism and prosperous capitalism. The success of the drama hinged on the outcome of this conflict. When the result was still uncertain, came the flood. This calamity forced the Syeds to take shelter in the brick-house of the Mirs. All differences were resolved. The boy of one party married the girl of the other. It gives the reader the impression that the conflict between feudalism and capitalism is as easily soluble. The beginning of the tale has no bearing on the end. What might have been developed as a good drama was washed away by flood waters.

The Dacca centre of Radio Pakistan recently observed a "Drama Week". The first play in their agenda was Askar Ibne Shaikh's *Dewan-e-Madina.*

The tale of *Dewan-e-Madina* is one of the finest tragedies in the ballads of Mymensingh. Obviously the dramatist intended to serve a tragedy. But the playwright failed to exploit the possibilities of the two events which could have rewarded his efforts. The first of these is the episode of Dulal's divorce of his wife. The other was when Madina sent away her son to his father, but the latter sent him back.

Dulal loved his wife passionately. He gave his wife his word that in no circumstance will he desert her. At this time his brother informs him that he has fixed another match for him, and says : "your wife cannot be more precious than the glory of your family. Listen Dulal, I too have been working twelve years, but never did I forget for a moment the interest of the family, of the house, nor did I forget my duties to our parents, to you". No sooner does Dulal hear this than he replies : "Stop, brother, I will divorce her right now".

Wonder of wonders, Dulal did not hesitate to act so cruelly, and the only provocation he needed was some words of wisdom from his brother. This imbecility in Dulal's character exposed itself once again when he asked his tired son who had come to live with him after covering a long distance, to go away, without even offerring him any refreshment. But what intrigues me most is this. Dulal deserted his wife and refused to give his son shelter because his brother did not wish it. This same Dulal goes rushing to his son, after the death of his wife Madina, and cries like this : "Jamal, my child. Come son, come near me. It is true I turned you out of my house—but never did I myself enter that house again." I ask myself, what did happen during the time the son was out of the house and Dulal's return to the divorced wife, to warrant conduct like this. I find no answer.

In order to cater to our sentiment, the author created situations which weakened the characters of the play and also the drama as a whole. There is a time and a place for everything, even for sentimentalism. But we cannot but object when we find that the obtrusion of sentimentalism interfering with the natural development of the story and is lending such traits to the characters as do not belong to them.

Sentimentalism affects literature in a number of ways. In certain stories and novels we find that the author's devotion to his subject has no scientific basis, but is entirely sentimental. One such story is Abul Kalam Shamsuddin's *Path Jana Nai*. The theme of the story is the frustration of a simple peasant caused by the effects of city life. The peasant had built a road connecting his village with the city and had to make great sacrifices for it. But contrary to his expectations, this road brought to his village epidemics, unknown diseases, immoral influences. The tranquillity of the village was gone.

The way the author has depicted the changes would give the reader the impression that it is the city which is to blame for all this misfortune. As if before the construction of this road, there were no quarrels in the village, no epidemics and diseases, no thefts and dacoities. As if, a village was a paradise. This kind of sentimental attachment to village life not only offends

against sociological theories but also betrays muddle-headedness. It is for this sentimentalism that the whole affair has become ridiculous.

At other times, we see that the author is identifying himself with one or the other of the characters in his story. As long as this is consistent with the character, we can have no objection to this practice. But that does not mean that the author is free to express his popular views through these characters, without caring whether or not the views are natural to the characters depicted. I say this because I found this happening in a story by Shahed Ali, *Oi Je Nil Akash*. It is a story which tells you about a village girl whose aesthetic sense is extraordinarily developed. This story has been written in the first person singular. The narrator of the story is a brother of the girls' husband, a relationship which probably allows a certain weakness, of one for the other, to exist. Listen to this :

"I suddenly woke up. The lantern near my head was still giving light. I saw her mysterious pair of eyes fixed on me. Her lips parted in a faint smile which disintegrated into bits of flowers. My bhabi (sister-in-law) ran her hands on my head, on my eyes. How sweet and gentle was the touch of her hands.

"I clung close to her as I lay asleep. Our hearts began to communicate. I felt her affection touching me like a soft breeze in a dark night. I could smell a rose-like fragrance which her body was emitting. It filled my heart."

I defy you to guess the age of this brother-in-law. The author gives us hints soon enough. "I was very young then," and then leaves no shadow of a doubt—"I was only eight." Do you have any comments ?

This sentimentalism which the boy betrays is really the author's own. That is how the story was spoilt.

There is another kind of weakness from which our authors suffer. They start writing a story and then find that the events are naturally and inevitably heading towards a conclusion which will greatly shock our accepted sense of morality and may even shake it to the core. When a writer suddenly discovers this the sentimentalist in him makes him halt and retrace his steps. Abu Rushd's *Ratom* is an example in point. The theme is the cause and effect of corruption in our social life. An impoverished office clerk was bringing a semblance of affluence to his house by the device of accepting bribes. As long as he was not caught, his friends, his wife, or any of his relations did not seem to mind it. The day he was caught, a chorus of condemnation started. Even his wife and children started thinking him a criminal. The impact of poverty brought about a process of disintegration. This has been well depicted by Abu Rushd. But the moment it seemed inevitable that the wife would also have to sell her body, and the husband would have to watch this helplessly for his own existence, Abu Rushd decided to stop. The husband had to commit suicide by taking ratom. The grimness of disintegration, and the natural development of the story, both suffered owing to this—and also the story in the same proportion.

Every author has certain opinions tucked behind his head but if these opinions are allowed to interfere with the natural development of a story, it

cannot but detract from the merit of the story. Likewise, no opinion should be preached through the mouths of characters in a novel, unless this opinion comes naturally and inevitably. It is from this kind of weakness that the stories of Alauddin Al-Azad suffer. The themes of his stories are often inconsistent with the characters depicted by him. Take for instance his *Mrigaya.* Most surprising of all is the fact that his characters think in a manner which is not natural to their social status or environments.

The very title of the story announced the writer's poetical intentions. But the abundance of poetry which we find in this story is totally out of keeping with the character he has depicted. The poetical excesses which we find in Amit in Tagore's *Shesher Kabita* have at least some justification, but this role does not suit Alauddin Al-Azad, and least of all the peasant boy in his story. This story is insufferable owing to its excessive sentimentalism.

But let it be understood that there may be as many opinions as there are men about sentimentalism. The emotional reactions of a man depend largely on his heritage, training, environment and taste. What seems sentimental to me may appear natural to you. The notion of sentimentality differs from country to country. What may seem sentimental to an Englishman, can never appear so to a Bengali. A thing to which the Frenchman will react ecstatically will probably extort only an indifferent, "It's all right" from the Englishman.

I want to make clear one more thing. This paper has been written from one particular standpoint, which is to find out where, how, and why there is sentimentality in our literature. My purpose was not to make a comprehensive survey of our literature. In consequence, I have not discussed what is good in our literature. Not only that. Even the deficiencies have been discussed from one specific point of view. Those I have discussed are not necessarily the foremost or most significant authors. On the other hand, the authors whom I have left out are not necessarily free from sentimentality. Nor is it necessarily true that it is not worthwhile discussing them. But I feel sorry that I could not discuss the writings of Abul Fazal, Syed Waliullah, Abul Mansur Ahmed and Mahbubul Alam as this paper has already run into an unwieldy length.

I was fully conscious of the danger of discussing literature from one particular standpoint alone and yet I ventured to do so because in my opinion sentimentality is the basic problem of East Pakistan's literature. As long as our authors do not realise the value of realism and intellect, and as long as they do not give evidence of a love for life, they are bound to display the same deficiencies. If we want to march a step forward towards maturity and development, the first thing we must do is to look beyond our little corners.

Siraiul Islam Chowdhury

PROSE in Bengali literature is of comparatively recent date. Our poetry has a history of more than a thousand years, but Bengali prose is not even two hundred years old. This is not without significance. Historically speaking, we do not have a long tradition of rational thinking. The geographical peculiarities of our country also tend to make us irrational and emotional.

If it is true that Nature has made us sentimental, it is also true that the sentimentality of our writers has found a refuge in Nature. And this is not surprising.

A writer of Hardy's genius can, of course, draw an epic picture of Nature without being sentimental, but for those who have neither the depth of Hardy's tragic vision nor the wealth of his talent, Nature is usually associated with sentiment, and what is worse, fluid sentiment. In contemporary fiction and drama one finds characters as simple as those in Jane Austen's novels ; but the environment they live in is different : it is surcharged with the melodramatic presence of Nature. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin's *Dui Mahal* (Two Apartments) and Kazi Afsaruddin Ahmed's *Char Bhanga Char* are cases in point. Nature is introduced here not because it was a dramatic necessity, but because the writers felt that it would serve well to create a sensational background. Imagine a scene in a novel called *Jiban Khudha* (Hunger for Life) by Abul Mansur Ahmed. During the dead hours of a moonless night in a family graveyard, one Azim Sardar, a frightful and coarse person, meets a lady who is veiled in black from head to foot . In that weired atmosphere the two have a heated discussion and in the midst of it the lady suddenly "draws out a thing from behind her cloak, aims it at Azim and says, 'Here is a pistol, do not try to move another step forward. Look here, this is Ajmal Chowdhury's grave. We shall stand on either side of it and talk. I want you to realise that even after death, Ajmal Ali Chowdhury remains the cause of our separation.' " The writer gives as many as sixteen pages to the description of the scene. In *Dui Mahal,* Mahfez, a noble savage, who lives almost like a disembodied entity, creates equally sensational scenes. Had these novelists been trying, like Mrs. Radcliffe, to write novels of terror, or had they, like Scott, taken to the writing of historical novels, their relish for such scenes could be justified. But they are, to use a hackneyed description, writing realistic novels about contemporary people. Their attachment to the sensational aspects of Nature has its origin, probably, in an unconscious feeling that sensationalism is a quality calculated to make the novel absorbing. Such sensation-mongering is definitely maudlin.

Since most of our writers, who belong to the middle class, live in towns, where the presence of Nature is scarcely noticeable, the attachment represents a sort of nostalgia for the past and a desire to recreate imaginatively what has ceased to exist in reality. The writer of *Char Bhanga Char* seems to have tried to use nature around a surging river as a symbol of regeneration. This reminds one of Shelley who used the restless aspects of Nature as symbols of revolt. Such symbols abound in Askar Ibne Shaikh's *Bidrohi Padma* (The Rebellious Padma) and *Duranta Dheu* (The Untamed Waves). The titles themselves

are suggestive enough. One can easily concede to the river Padma an attitude of revolt, nor is it very difficult to imagine the untamed waves as symbols of resurgent forces ringing the knell of oppression ; but one feels that they would be more appropriate in poetry. When the dramatist, at important dramatic moments, drags in, not without discomfort, natural phenomena and tries to make them function as symbols, he sets himself a difficult task, because the dramatic form itself entails certain limitations. And when a dramatist feels that he must use them, the feeling verges on sentimentality.

The sentimentality our writers betray in characterisation has its origin in two causes—one moral, the other literary. Many of our writers lack the maturity of sensibility which would outweigh their weakness for stock characters and situations. That explains the abundance of such characters in our fiction and drama. But the moral cause is more potent. Not only are our writers alive to the sharp distinction between good and evil, but they feel impelled to go excitedly out of their way to support the good and damn the evil. This obviously indicates an incapacity for detachment from such feelings and sentiments as they share with others in society. But the artist is different from the common man precisely because of his capacity, as Croce puts it, for "a profound penetration in virtue of which we pass from troublesome emotion to the serenity of contemplation". If a writer remains engrossed in fluid sentiments and gets passionately agitated about over-simplified moral questions, one cannot expect him to acquire that capacity for artistic detachment—'negative capability' as Keats calls it—without which the creation of living characters becomes an impossibility. The uncontrolled moral zeal of our writers makes them, some of them at least, create conventional hazy characters, who are either too good, or too bad ; either models of virtue or incarnations of evil.

The hero in contemporary writing looks, at times, rather curious. He is usually a young idealist, immaculate in conduct and seething with reformist zeal. Of course, the writers differ in the detailed account of their heroes' characters ; but intrinisically the heroes are almost the same. Take, for example, the heroes in Askar Ibne Shaikh's plays. Some of his plays deal with historical events, others with contemporary society : but the heroes tend to forget their differences and merge themselves in one character—the zealous idealist. Showkat Osman views life from a different angle, but his heroes,—Shoeb in *Amlar Mamla* (All About Bureaucrats) is one—are not very different from Ibne Shaikh's. A contemporary writer of the West would not think of making such a goody-goody person—whose unfaltering goodness makes him a bore—the central figure of his novel or play. Somerset Maugham once said that one should be familar with the deficiencies in the characters of great men because that would give one self-confidence. We in East Pakistan seem to differ. We would rather look up for confidence to an imaginary idol and expect him to change the world, making it a fitter place to live in. The sentimental conception of the hero—or rather, the confidence in him—blurs the vision of our writers so much as to make them forget even the necessity of demonstrating how their characters are really what they believe them to be.

Shoeb of *Amlar Mamla* is a philanthropist and an idealist ; but the impression you form about him from your reading of the play is that he is

nothing more than an impolite young man—petulant and overbearing. In Helal, the idealist in *Shesh Addhay* (the Last Chapter), another play, the dramatist, Askar Ibne Shaikh, wanted to create a character who would fight relentlessly, and if necessary alone against all evils. When the sensational and touching story of his parentage is revealed to him, he realizes that in society he would be known as an illegitimate child. His father, the local zemindar, a symbol and a vestige of decaying feudalism, has perpetrated on him and his mother the greatest possible injustice on the ground of his mother's being of lowly origin. This mother, Zerina, is an exceptionally courageous and capable woman. Fighting against all the fearful odds that a village girl forsaken by her husband must face, she educated herself on her own and brought her son up, without revealing her identity to him. Compared with Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* this woman would appear far more bold and capable. Nora's husband, Helmer, looks, if you compare him with Zerina's husband, an honest and pious gentleman. Still, that affectionate and somewhat timid housewife, Nora, did not, at the supreme moment of awakening in her of a new personality, hesitate to leave her repentant husband. But Zerina with all her courage and personality seems only too eager to go back to the not-so-enviable 'refuge' of her cruel husband, who is, in fact, more of a landlord than a husband. With 'tearful eyes' she makes her son embrace his unjust father. Perhaps the conception of freedom of women is not rooted firmly in our country, but how could Helal, after enduring for twentyone years the heartless neglect and cruelty of his father towards them, finally accept him ! Both our dramatists have, in fact, shown a sort of sentimental confidence in their heroes whose greatness they have not objectively proved. These two heroes—Shoeb and Helal—are, like many of their counterparts, rather Grandisonian—their goodness being as boring as it was in Richardson's.

Like their goodness, the vileness of the bad characters is also exaggerated. Just as you can recognise the heroes by the most sure insignia—idealism, so also you can know the villains by their almost universal badge—an inflated weakness for womenfolk. And for precisely the same reasons which make our writers all praise for their heroes the villains are frowned upon and condemned.

Shurja Dighal Bari, *Bidrohi Padma*, *Dui Mahal*, *Boba Manush*, *Mukh-o-Mukhosh*, *Ghurni Hawa*—these are six works by six different writers and they differ in their literary excellence but all of them have a point of concurrence, the character of the villain. There are six of them—Gadu Pardhan, Dewan Sahib, Mir Khan, Rahim Joardar, Shamsher, and Basrat respectively. But in fact they have only one character—that of the lecher who seduces girls. In their moral enthusiasm the writers have closed their eyes to the very elementary fact that the bad characters are usually more various and call for greater analysis. And has not Shelley, to take a well-known example, shown in his *Prometheus Unbound* how the portrayal of evil suffers from over-simplification in the hands of the idealist who impatiently waits for its downfall ? Aldous Huxley maintains that in European literature the portrayal of evil has usually been more satisfactory than that of good. But for reasons explained above the

same has not been true of our literature. There are instances where writers feel uncomfortable in the presence of evil characters. The treatment that Abul Fazal, one of our older novelists, metes out to Khaled in his *Ranga Prabhat* (the Radiant Dawn) is an example. Khaled has the unmistakable makings of a villain—once he seduced a girl. It is because of that that the writer sends him hurriedly away to Burma while both the father and the son of this Khaled—they are noble—get elaborate treatment. Khaled, one feels, could easily be developed into a complex character, exerting an influence—contrary to that of his virtuous father—on his young son. Dilara in Askar Ibne Shaikh's *Agnigiri* (The Volcano) is quite a character and does not fit into any of the existing models. She has her husband, but lives with notorious soldiers, but is pure at heart. But the dramatist feels uncomfortable about her and, therefore, lets her be killed by a rifle shot by one Mr. Brenan. You can, of course, argue that even Shakespeare had to dismiss his Falstaff hurriedly when he realised that he was becoming more important than the Prince. But the indecent hurry with which these two writers get rid of the characters they feel uncomfortable about reminds one of Dickens rather than Shakespeare. Towards the end of his novel *David Copperfield* Dickens shook his responsibilities off by sending, as G. K. Chesterton puts it, "a whole cart-load, or rather boatload, of his characters" away to the colonies. This, we must admit, is nothing but sentimentality.

Punishment for the wicked and reward for the virtuous—these are two important principles in the ethics of middle class people. Plato's misgivings about the moral effects that a tragedy might produce in the readers by showing that rectitude is not always rewarding is probably typical of that ethics. When a writer fails to rise above this attitude, one can justifiably call him sentimental. For example in *Amlar Mamla* we find the dramatist, Showkat Osman, harassing Akhunjee very much in the style of a common man wreaking vengeance upon his enemy. Akram is described thus : "A young man makes his appearance. He is in embroidered pajamas. On his head is a Turkish cap. He wears a thin small beard. His face is triangular, the ears are like those of a greyhound." This is sufficient to indicate the dramatist's attitude towards the character. And characterisation, consequently, suffers. Akhunjee, the old bureaucrat who, in season and out of season, utters his watchword, "Administration is greater", would make a good hero in a sentimental farce. Throughout the play the dramatist scoffs at him and does not spare him even at the end where the poor Akhunjee sustains a pathetic defeat. As the curtain falls, Mrs. Akhunjee is found "looking at the audience and patting the head of her husband with an indulgent smile on her face". If you read between the lines you have a suspicion that the hands are those of the dramatist as well.

Similar things occur in *Etimkhana* (The Orphanage), a play written by the same dramatist. A notorious character, Arif, has made his fortune during the Second World War ; his task was one of supplying workers to the Army. Now that he is rich, he turns philanthropist and comes to visit an orphanage. Malek, a young boy in the Orphanage knew how this human shark has made him an orphan, sending his father to war. The boy seeks vengeance upon the character and succeeds in harassing him at a reception arranged in his

honour. Objectively speaking, this seems hardly credible. How could a helpless child like Malek dare defy the entire machinery of the Orphanage administration ? When young Oliver in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* stands up, demands an additional morsel of food and gets punishment instead, the incident seems quite natural and our credulity is not taxed. But this dramatist has thrown all the rules of probablity overboard, because the moralist in him must get the vicious character punished.

Years ago the novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterjee created the character of a graceful courtesan, Rajlakkhi by name. She lived a not-so-pious life, but was sincerely in love with an adventurous young man. This character could rouse in the readers a sentimental feeling of pity mixed with admiration. The novelist's attitude was also sentimental. Although the writers in West Bengal have outgrown this attitude, many of our writers in East Pakistan have not. This explains the presence of a host of Rajlakkhis in our contemporary fiction and drama. Askar Ibne Shaikh's heroine Bibi Azizan, in a play called after her name, is a courtesan of Cawnpore. She is not only a courtesan, but is also in love with a young patriot Shamsuddin. If Azizan is not wholly a copy of Rajlakkhi, as she is able to merge her personal love for Shamsuddin in her love for the country, Roushan Bai, the courtesan in Abul Kalam Shamsuddin's *Dui Mahal* is, for her sole interest is a bright young man, Alamgir. To entertain Alamgir she rallies all her skill and arranges a dance ; and afterwards when he needs her help, she does not hesitate to part with all her ornaments. Begum Sahiba in *Jiban Khudha* was herself a courtesan in early life, skilled in the arts of dancing and music ; but she was a discontented soul. One need not disapprove of the presence of courtesans in fiction, but when one finds that three different writers trying to create three different characters all unconsciously depict the same stock character one cannot help feeling that it is their sentimental attachment to this type which is to blame.

And not the courtesan alone, there are other kinds of stock characters as well. Consider characters with physical deformities and incorrigible mannerisms. A few decades ago writers used to fall back upon them for creating comic relief. Now that we have advanced in taste the use of such characters appears to be rather crude. Here are a few instances. Nurul Momen's *Rupantar* (Metamorphosis) has a bald-headed character. Alauddin Al-Azad's *Shamatal* (The Same Level) makes use of a slightly deaf person. Abul Fazal in *Ranga Prabhat* drags in two characters who have incorrigible mannerisms.

Like stock characters stock situations also abound. Many of our writers relish, to take only one example, the delineation of scenes where a lecherous tyrant is seen trying to commit an outrage on an innocent girl. These bear an obvious resemblance to a famous scene inDina Bandhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan* (The Indigo Mirror) where an English officer, Mr. Rogue, makes an assault on a wailing peasant girl, Khetramani. But being imitations these are at many removes from the original. The instances of incendiarism in such novels as *Ranga Prabhat*, *Dui Mahal*, *Char Bhanga Char*, and *Ghurni Hawa* are also examples of stock situations.

The unabashed use of these hackneyed situations indicates that a type of sentimental attachment to them has blinded our writers to the weakness of the tendency. This is one of the causes responsible for sentimentalism and I shall call this the literary cause.

The eager desire that our novelists betray to seek reconciliations is an unmistakable sign of sentimentality. Parallels to this can easily be found in the sentimental writings of the early 18th century. Take, for example, Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift.* A misguided husband deserts a wife. Ten years after, they meet each other and the husband falls, unwittingly of course, in love with his own wife. And then the reconciliation and the repentance of the husband ! If this story is sentimental, Nurul Momen's *Rupantar* (Metamorphosis) must also be called sentimental. In the play Rashid, after his return from England, realises that his wife, Rizia, is much too unsophisticated to be his partner in life. He has no time to consider the fact that Rizia's family had to pay for his education in England and that he had not as yet met his wife in person. The husband advertises for a lady secretary ; employs one who calls herself 'The Lady of the Park' and is none other than his own wife. The dialogue is witty, intelligent and, at moments, brilliant ; but the story hardly rises above the common level of sentimentality. This proves another point, that too much attention to dialogue causes the plot to suffer ; and even Congreve, we know, could not escape this consequence.

Abdul Haque in his *Adwitya* (The Matchless One) does not pay so much attention to the dialogue, and seems occupied with the task of curing society of a malady. Anwarul Islam has made his fortune as a black-marketeer and has, in the true style of other dishonest characters in our literature, taken a second wife. But retribution is not slow to come. The first wife decides to live on her own ; the grown up daughter becomes studiously cold, and to crown all, his sister's husband marries for the second time. The play closes with a scene where Anwar's second wife goes away and the first wife comes back. And, henceforward, we can reasonably expect, they would live as happily as the prince and princess lived in the fairy tales. If with *Adwitya* this be the reader's hopeful guess the author of *Ranga Prabhat* leaves us in no doubt about the future happiness of his hero and heroine. Because the union—and a genuine one at that, considering the duet they were singing at the end of the book—comes after sacrifices. Kamal, the hero had to hurt himself dangerously while extinguishing a fire and Maya, the heroine, had to leave her family and society in Calcutta. The way the novelist makes the Hindu heroine marry a Muslim reminds one of the naive simplicity with which Tennyson made his rebel princess fall in love with a not-so-princely prince. Well, in both cases serious problems were involved.

Prose style, when affected by sentimentalism, becomes confused and rhetorical. Many of our writers suffer from this weakness.

Style apart, other aspects of technique have also suffered. Some of our writers do not know how to begin and when to stop. In their enthusiasm for platitudinous observations, they would make the beginning unnecessarily long and continue even after the story has ended. There are instances where the writers have appended morals to their stories making them look like fables

from Aesop. You may, while reading a story, be jolted by the sudden appearance of a nice little sermon. If you find two or three stories being jumbled up in a single plot, you have, of course, technical incompetence to blame ; but that incompetence itself comes from a notion that in literature the subject alone matters.

The analysis of sentimentalism attempted above does not, however, prove that our writers are completely unconscious about it. They at times realise that this is a weakness, but the man who thinks differs from the man who acts and while actually engaged in the work of writing, the emotional self predominates over the rational one. This emotional self constitutes the moral sensibility as well. Here we recognize once more that the cause of our sentimentality is not wholly literary ; it is primarily moral. True, stock characters and situations abound ; true, many of our writers share with the eighteenth century English sentimental writers, say Sterne, the desire to introduce "some tender-hearted damsels on whose cheeks" some bitter affliction has placed a tear" and thereby to make the audience "take a white handkerchief from your pocket and wipe the moisture from her eyes and your own." But our writers are sentimental not so much because they are sentimentally attached to such characters as because they think it incumbent on them to reform their society.

Sentimentalism in eighteenth century English literature was also characterised by such a reformist zeal. Like the eighteenth century dramatist who declared that his purpose was "to expose and reform licentious irregularities that too often break in upon peace and happiness of the married state," many of our writers can also say that they have taken to writing because they wanted to cure society of the many diseases it suffers from. This is a duty they feel, they owe to society.

The moral purpose itself does not make a piece of writing necessarily sentimental. Bernard Shaw has declared in so many words that for art's sake alone he would not have taken the trouble of writing a single line, but that has not made him sentimental. This is because of the skill the dramatist shows in building up the plays, in probing the characters and in making the dialogue racy and pleasant. Moral zeal in an immature writer, however, is bound to seem obtrusive and malodorous.

Critical ideas and writings, if well developed, can work as a remedy and make our writers realise that their role is different from that of the reformer and the preacher. But we are yet to develop our criticism. Considering the very limited tradition of our prose writings, we need not be scared by the fact. And meanwhile, is not there a growing realisation of the true role of the writer ?

SOCIAL QUESTIONS IN BENGALI FICTION

Shamsuddin Abul Kalam

SOCIAL questions have always figured in the literatures of different countries. Writers can seldom get away from the contemporary problems of their life and society. An awareness of society, we all know, is intimately connected with the inspiration that leads to the creation of great literature. One is easily reminded of books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or of authors of the class of Tolstoy and Turgenev. But at the root of these books lay not merely an awareness of some topical problem but a realisation of the very real and fundamental truths of human life. In other words, the sense of values of such great authors was not determined by a few merely topical and contemporary political and social slogans but by a vision of life in its fullness and totality, transcending the limitations of time and space. Such values have enriched civilisation in the past and are preparing the way for the future of one world, creating new bonds of friendship between nation and nation.

We all know that there is a basic unity among all peoples. The desire for love, peace and happiness and freedom is universal. That is why *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a classic of a country thousands of miles away from ours, appeals to us so deeply. Considered merely from the national point of view such works created history in the countries of their origin. But their success is even greater as works which have aroused sympathy for the downtrodden in the minds of millions of readers all the world over. Such literature embodies the criticism of contemporary social problems on the one hand and on the other creates ideals for mankind at large. I feel that we should discuss our own novels and short stories in East Pakistan from this particular angle. But it will surely not be irrelevant to say a few words first about our social problems.

Our country is primarily agricultural. Most of our people are cultivators. They are neither Aryans nor Arabs. Their body and their mind have been formed by the soft soil of East Pakistan, by its wide blue sky, its murmuring rivers, its warm benevolent sun, its pleasant breeze and its splendid seasons. Nature has given their mind and body a distinctive stamp. Depending so largely on the bounties of nature, they are naturally a God-fearing people. But they have to struggle against many enemies to be be able to keep alive. In the world of nature they have to fight against flood and famine, and the savage depredations of wild animals. In the past they fought against foreign aggressors. There were enemies inside, too, inherent in the very social structure. The landlords and the money-lenders and the system of caste were great obstacles to the growth and development of our people. But their spirit was not crushed by these obstacles. They did not lose their identity nor did they give up their struggle against great odds. This splendid, unconquerable spirit led eventually to the emancipation of the country from foreign rule.

We are a free people now ; but have our problems been solved ? True, we have abolished the notorious land system known as the Permanent Settlement ; many development projects have also been started ; but the majority of the people still live in poverty. Their lot has not much changed. It is not possible to improve the lot of the common man to a very great degree quickly. That is true. But what is painful is the absence of sincere, honest and generous efforts to do so on the part of the new rich and the middle class society that have grown up in recent years in our country, in and around the cities.

The wealthy were there even before. Their role was one of unabashed exploitation. After Independence when most of the powerful Hindu middle class left East Pakistan the upper and middle class Muslims moved in and took their place. They too busied themselves with enriching their own coffers, without paying the least heed to the fate of the masses. All moral values went overboard. Injustice, greed, corruption, selfishness, became the ruling instincts. The Zemindari system was abolished but the poor peasant still found himself in the same old pitiable position. Opportunities for education increased but the appropriate climate for the development of character and great ideals was not created. Above all, we failed to view the world and life in true perspective. We have not yet acquired a proper sense of values. Coupled with the many existing social evils a senseless ignorant pride is leading the country to the abyss of despair. The selfish politicians and statesmen are recklessly exploiting the poor, masking themselves under the disguise of democracy. The common man is suffering today from all kinds of want. A thousand and one problems encircle him. The sense of values and the education which can remedy such a state of affairs are still lacking.

But it is heartening to find that at least a handful of intellectuals are giving some thought to this matter. Their awareness of the social problems is still disconnected and segmented. But it is there and is constantly growing.

In the field of literature can be detected one of the earliest signs of the slow growth of this awareness. All our contemporary novelists and short story writers in East Pakistan show this awareness in their writings more or less. This is present in the older writers, though it is more marked in the new, younger ones. Their work reflects contemporary life and its problems. They also reveal an awareness of the need to think of the good of mankind at large. What is a pity, however, is that most of their stories are scattered in the pages of different periodicals. Few of them have been published in the form of books. Incidentally, I may mention here the very great dearth of enterprising publishing houses here. Almost all of our publishers are primarily busy printing school and college text books and making easy money. There are some exceptions, though. A few publishers are regularly publishing the works of our novelists and short story writers after buying the copyright. Some new publishing houses with ideas and enterprise are also growing up. Recently, after the Government took over the task of publishing the text books, some old aristocratic publishing houses have also been showing some

interest in creative literature. But most of them are still concentrating on publishing books that would easily appeal to our young adolescent middle class mind and would sell quickly. The more serious of our creative writers do not, naturally, feel very happy in the present circumstances.

The proper assessment of our contemporary writing has been made very difficult by the absence of such writings in book form. You can hardly do justice to a writer by reading a story of his in one periodical and finding another story after quite a while in another periodical. Nevertheless certain trends in our contemporary fictional writings are quite noticeable.

We can detect these trends in the treatment of social questions in our fiction, namely, Marxian, Islamic and liberal humanistic. The writers representing all these three trends show a great love for the country and its people. Their angle of vision is, however, different because of their mental make-up, and the influences they grew up in.

Towards the end of British rule Marxian thought quite naturally spread in this part of Asia. Many writers were influenced by the Marxian ideology. The prevailing inequalities in our society and in the system of production and distribution of wealth also awakened their interest in that ideal of life. Though the Marxian ideology has lost much of of its appeal today and has grown outdated to a large extent, yet it has considerably influenced some of our writers. In their writings we often find the lack of a real feeling for life. They frequently betray a spirit of indignation and sentimentalism. Trying to serve a social or political purpose they turn their art into propaganda and degrade it. Naturally their work often becomes merely topical and contemporary. Alauddin Al-Azad is subtler whereas Showkat Osman is rather blunt, though he has a light manner. Both of them are conscious artists : but one of them is a little restless, the other more restrained. Leaving aside their faults and weaknesses, one easily admits that they have written some excellent short stories. Incidentally, let me mention a story by each. In Showkat Osman's story *Faut*, published in the first issue of *Shamakal*, he tells the story of Shah Waliullah Gorakhpuri. While returning from Mecca after performing the pilgrimage he falls ill on the ship and dies unattended while his three wives quarrel by his sick bed over the right of nursing him. In this story Showkat Osman is not eager to establish a thesis nor is his vision coloured by personal indignation. Alauddin Al-Azad's short story *Shamatal* published again in *Shamakal* reveals a deep truth about contemporary life and society, though its organisation is a little loose. Here the author has depicted a fine picture of how honesty and good intentions are defeated under pressure of poverty and other unhappy circumstances of a lower middle class life. It appears that Azad is also trying to extend his vision beyond the merely Marxian point of view. If these two writers tried to see life more deeply and more fully, our literature would be considerably enriched. It is necessary for them to acquire broader attitude towards humanity transcending their class-consciousness. Another writer of this group, Mr. Sirajul Islam has written a fine short story against the background of the language movement. He has shown the qualities of a genuine artist in that story. Others of this group hardly merit serious discussion. Their ideas are foggy, characterisation laboured and treatment of problems unreal.

The other group which treats our social questions from the Islamic point of view is very small. They have not created any successful novel or short story. We get a rather definite point of view in some novels of the pre-Independence period written with an Islamic bias, like *Anwara*, *Manwara* or *Abdullah*. We have not yet created any successful novels like these in the post-Independence period. Whether Akbar Husain, the author of *Ki Paini* and *Mohamukti* should be considered as one belonging to this class is debatable. Some think that Ashrafuzzaman's *Manzil* belongs to this category of writing. These novels are not, however, very effective or successful as genuine literature. They can only be mentioned in a historical survey of our literature. Personally, I think that this talk about the Islamic point of view in the treatment of social questions in our literature is rather dated for two reasons. Firstly, this group does not give any importance to the pre-Islamic culture of this country. But it will not do. Nor is it fair. No good can come of denying the culture that has evolved out of the soil. Secondly, the point of view termed Islamic and as expressed by these writers is tinged with medievalism. The wider implications of Islam that emphasised the search for truth, beauty and universal love are not their concern. Their attitude is narrow, sectarian, limited and puritanical. This trend, however, is consistently and gradually on the wane.

The real artists among our contemporary fictional writers fall beyond the pale of the two groups discussed so far. They try to view life as a whole and are not concerned with the Muslim section of it. They are not engrossed merely in any class interpretation. They, too, are aware of the many problems in our society, of the many evils and inequalities existing all around us. But they want freedom and happiness for all sections of the people. The artistic quality of their writings is not always equal but the few truly successful novels and short stories that we have in East Pakistan today are their creations. Prominent among them are Syed Waliullah, Abu Ishaque, Shahed Ali, Mahbubul Alam, Abul Fazal, Shahid Saber, Zahir Raihan, Daulatunnesa Khatun, Abu Rushd, Mirza Muhammad Abdul Hye, Mobinuddin Ahmed and Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury.

In his novel *Lal Shalu* Syed Waliullah has drawn a beautiful picture of how our simple common men are mercilessly exploited in the name of religion. A clear vision, depth of feeling and thought and sympathy have made *Lal Shalu* an outstanding novel of our times. It is, however, true, that if the novel could rise above the vagueness of its last section it would have been a much more remarkable piece of work. Still inasmuch as it contains an exposure of a major evil in our society and treats an important social question of our times artistically, it is a significant novel. Pictures of social problems can be found in many of Waliullah's short stories too. I shall draw attention particularly to his story *Ekti Tulshi Gacher Kahini*. In this story he has dealt with a problem which none has dared to approach in contemporary East Pakistan. It is not only one of Waliullah's finest stories but also one of the very finest short stories in East Pakistan's literature. Here the author has placed the artist in him above all considerations and therein lies the secret of his success. Abu Ishaque is another successful artist of this kind. In *Shurja Dighal Bari* he has treated of the problems of the common man who

lives in perpetual want and poverty with great sympathy and sensitiveness. Incidentally, there is in this novel a picture of the problems that arise out of divorce. *Shurja Dighal Bari* may not be called a regular novel in the strict sense of the word but it is certainly an excellent narrative, embodying significant human emotions and meeting the requirements of good art. The feeling of love for life characterises some of Shahed Ali's stories, too. Mention may be made in this context of his story *Fashal Tolar Kahini.* Employing vivid pictorial imagery he depicted the picture of the problem-ridden life of the peasant of North Bengal in that story. His stories are mostly built around the problems of poverty that complicate the life of the poor peasant. But lately after his entry into active politics, he has been neglecting his creative literary work. Shahid Saber, another young writer, displays a happy combination of intellect and emotion in some of his stories. His emphasis on the human element in the treatment of social questions promises a bright future for him. Consider, in this context, his story called *Ek Tukro Megh.* The story is built around the problem of unemployment. But the theme has been treated with a feeling of love and sympathy for life and not from any propagandist motive. In another story *Deal* he ably treated the problem of barriers created between man and man by various systems. Shahid Saber does not want to make an easy, cheap appeal. That is his strong point. In other writers of this category also we notice this emphasis on the human element. They try to deal with social problems, mainly the problem of poverty and of the unequal distribution of the country's wealth, with sympathy. Of them, Zahir Raihan has a distinctive quality of his own, in the matter of both analysis of problems and characterisation. If he concerns himself a little less with the emotions of love, a promising writer like him will be able to produce really fine stories and novels.

It is difficult for me to give an adequate and a full discussion of all our writers within the short compass of my paper. I have, however, tried to say a few words in my own way. I too, have dealt with some of our contemporary social questions in my short stories and novels. I have treated of the problems of poverty and privation in the lives of the peasants, of the problems of emancipation of common man from the exploitations of the landed aristocracy, and the money-lenders as well as of the problems of the heart. The verdict of the reader would be the last word on the quality of of such works. I can only say that I believe in a thorough, searching and sympathetic treatment of the social questions. When I have dealt with the problems in the lives of the neglected poor peasants of East Pakistan I have done so not with the specific purpose of bringing about immediate social changes but because I was impelled by a wider love of life. Life to me is a mixture of the joy of union and the pain of separation, and ennobled by love. I have tried in my own way to depict some aspects of that life.

If, when all is said and done, we agree that the source from which all great literature springs is a genuine love of life, then East Pakistan fictional writings would be enriched in proportion as that love is genuinely felt and expressed by its writers. That would depend on the proper realisation of the values of life. This applies as much to our readers as to our writers. Only

in such conditions can the treatment of social questions in our literature be attractive.

Fictional writing in East Pakistan is still in its infancy. But it has a bright future ahead for Nature and the environments of this country are particularly conducive to the realisation of the greater values of life. It is not difficult to find support for this hope in the folk songs and ballads written by the common men of our villages. In this context it is necessary to remember that the successful growth and development of art depends on a particular stage of advancement and progress in the country as a whole, at least on the realisation of the need for such progress. When that happens through education and the removal of social and political inequities, the treatment and analysis of social questions in contemporary novels and short-stories will be more satisfactory.

THE TREATMENT OF SEX IN FICTION

Sarwar Murshid

THE subject of sex in literature is, you will agree, a large one. Man's attitude to sex is determined by nature, notions of supernature, and by other relations of man in society, such as economics. Nature again subsumes physical environment and racial temperament. Obviously, many of these things are matter for consideration by the sociologist. The manifestation of the phenomenon of sex, which includes all that man has experienced of love through the ages, is, in literature, as various as it is complex. There is, therefore, no limit to the possible angles from which it could be viewed. In this essay however my approach would be frankly selective.

In Muslim life and in Muslim literature, with the exception of the literature of Sufism, there is an unequivocal recognition of the importance of the body and the legitimacy of its desires and pleasures. In Islam, as much as in Platonism and Christianity, the first good is however God. Islam insists on seeing life within a supernatural frame, for the supernatural sense gives to life a "meaning in the light of which it is possible for the individual to see all his acts in due proportion." The Koranic position is that men and women are for the fulfilment of each other, and that the sex instinct is like hunger and thirst. It is an animal instinct in need of restraint but not to be ashamed of : "Permitted to you upon the night of the Fast is to go in to your wives ; they are a vestment for you, and you are a vestment for them ... so lie with them, and seek what God has prescribed for you. And eat and drink ... then complete the Fast unto the night." What is permitted is good enough but you must not let your eyes stray from the higher good. In Plato's *Symposium* too, Diotima, while characterising love as being of an intermediate nature, between men and the gods, that is as being attached to two worlds, indicates for physical love a place at the base of a hierarchical system of ascent towards Absolute Beauty which is but Absolute Good. In the same way, Christianity in its Thomist form, permits after a great deal of ambivalence, physical desire and pleasure as long as they do not threaten to obscure the first good through "the submergence of the intellectual faculty."

I fear it is not fashionable to quote from religious classics these days, and I think I saw lips curl in a shape between pity and sarcasm. The fundamental ideas that lie at the back of a culture have however got to do with religion. They discipline, both consciously and unconsciously, our feelings and appetites, give form and stability to our perception, and ultimately influence conduct. A tradition, religious or otherwise, even if it becomes inadequate, performs the important function of stimulating reaction. Most of us are what we are either by accepting or reacting against our tradition. But to return to the Koranic passage. According to it sexual love is a very earthy business, a complex of intimate passion—notice the metaphor of the vestment—and desire, but it must be made 'reasonable' by the Higher Love.

The Muslim heaven is, at least on one level of comprehension, a beautifully sensuous place :

> There wait on them immortal youths
> With bowls and ewers and a cup from a pure spring
> Wherefrom they get no aching of the head nor any madness
> And fruit that they prefer
> And flesh of fowls that they desire,
> And there are fair ones with wide, loving eyes,
> Like unto hidden pearls,
> Reward for what they used to do.

'They' of course refer to the virtuous. There are elements in this description of heaven which put me in mind of a picture of the Greek Elysium in one of W. B. Yeats's poems called *News for the Delphic Oracle*. It must be made clear however that the sensual strain is not the only strain, and to some, not even an important strain, in the Koran. It is as possible to quote from the Koran verses proving everything in the world somewhat unreal, including the act of procreation.

Similarly, body-oriented love is not the only element in our erotic tradition, although that, to my knowledge, receives greater emphasis. Nevertheless, how much this tradition owes to the Koran is worth investigating, and I trust some competent scholar would some day perform the job. It is possible that Muslims of our country have not failed to assimilate the significance attached to the body in the Koran. I recall in this connection passages in a book, once popular and now difficult to obtain, called *Maulud Sharif* by Mir Musharraf Husain, in support of my suggestion. They are an elaborate variation of the passage quoted earlier from the Koran and form part of the author's description of the Prophet's 'Miraj'. Mir Musharraf Husain's paraphrase makes the picture of the Muslim heaven clearly sensual, and because of its subject matter his book must have been treasured by religious-minded Muslims who form the vast majority of our population. It would therefore take a lot of proof to establish that Mir Musharraf Husain's image of heaven was not the popular image of it in the Muslim mind. The simple peasant hero of Showkat Osman's story *She Keman Kore Shwarge Gelo* is perhaps typical of his fellows in the rural community in that he is unable to visualize the pearl-eyed virgins of heaven except in the likeness of his plain, youthful, wife Kulsum. Abed Ali is in love with his wife and therefore projects his home and familiar raptures into heaven.

A clear reflection of the popular notion of love is to be found in our puthis. In them there is an unambiguous recognition of love as a thing of the body, and in some of them an immediate slaking of desire rather than postponement of it seems to be the norm of sexual behaviour. This attitude is typified by a most popular work entitled *Saiful Mulk Badiujjamal*, which in its unabashed sexuality closely conforms to the spirit of its original in the *Arabian Nights*, an admirably fine document on the life of the followers of Islam at a later period of history. When I say this I am not unmindful of the familiar convention of idealization in the *Arabian Nights* according to which the beloved has to be won through great trial. Their heroes undertake

fantastic adventures. It is however not these, but the description of their amour, that stands out in power and actuality, sometimes in gross, nasty, realism. A probable complementary influence upon the Muslim attitude to sex is the Hindu classical notion of love as a matter of natural delight. Whatever the ultimate sources of our erotic tradition, it is a basically earthy attitude to love which, with varying degrees of refinement, but without much violent change or reaction, persists in the life and literature of East Pakistan.

The Muslim ideal is akin to the classical Latin spirit as seen in Ovid and Catullus whose attitudes are frankly sensual and recall both pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Muslim writers and also our own Alawal and Bharatchandra. It is interesting to note that romantic love arose at a far later date, in Christian times, and was not known before the eleventh century. What we have designated as the Muslim attitude is, in the more refined sections of the community, fully conscious of the value of ritual and that degree of asceticism which consists in the deferring of wishes. It does not however treat love as a 'Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.'

When Western materialism and naturalism, influences not easy to assess, reached us, they strengthened an already existing bias towards the body in our view of sex. Why however our writers have not so far evinced the ability or the insight to assimilate the lesson of modern realism or the findings of modern psychology fully is another matter. In what follows it would be my endeavour to indicate the characteristic features of our erotic tradition as well as its peculiar limitations as they appear in the treatment of peasant, lower and middle class life in contemporary fiction.

The picture of sexual love among peasants is warm with passionate attachment, savage hatred, jealousy, faithlessness and spectacular remorse. In this world passion is deepened not so much by any fine conventions of restraint or moral rectitude as by the barrier put between one human heart and another by the lecherous, the greedy and by inhuman and hypocritical guardians of religion. This love is straightforward and has the natural beauty of health ; and though not inarticulate, it is largely a matter of touch and feeling.

In Alauddin Al-Azad's story *Surma* a separated but deeply caring young couple escape from the village, the wife from the indignity of a temporary marriage with an influential old lecher, the only sanctioned means of their remarriage, on the night of the monstrous ceremony. In Shamsuddin Abul Kalam's *Banya*, the picture of a man and a woman, isolated by unseeing passion and desire for revenge on the one hand and black hatred on the other and locked in a deadly fight on the dark waters of the flood on a rough, murky night, has an elemental beauty, not easy to forget. Azad's 'Corn girl' in *Dhan Kanya* succumbs to the temptation of prosperity and social position, jilts her selfless lover of childhood while he serves a term in prison for fighting the Zemindar's men, marries the Zemindar though his intentions are ignoble, and on the young lover's release after an agonizing meeting with him in the course of which he nearly takes her life, and then forgives her with withering contempt, takes her own life a day later.

Many of the dramas of this love are acted out against a background of stark poverty and harsh predatory forces, especially those connected with war and famine. This makes sexual loyalty appear heroic as in Shamsuddin's *Durjog* and faithlessness human as in Sardar Zainuddin's fine story *Shabjaner Shangshar*.

In this life there is occasional incest too as in Azad's *Brishti*, a remarkably good story packed with irony, in which an old, rich bigot hunts out, in a drouth, the supposed cause of this visitation from God, and fastens the stigma of illicit motherhood on an innocent woman. While, he sits in judgment as the head of the village inquisition on the innocent creature at night, his young wife, who owing to her unsatisfied tormented youth, develops a grudge against nature herself, has an affair with her young step-son on her husband's bed. Rains come in torrents, and when the old cuckold pleased with his righteousness and insight into sin, returns after passing a particularly harsh sentence upon the alleged offender and thanks God, his wife now able to forgive nature, vaguely answers him and starts bathing mysteriously in the first, *life*-giving showers of the year.

In another of Azad's stories there is another picture of this life. In his *Pratham Shikar*, a poor story, he presents a character called Shundaraddi. His soul impenetrable by religion or unintimidated by social or moral convention, he lives close to the earth and, like a dark part of her, seems to know her mind. He lives with a woman who, one guesses, is someone else's runaway wife. Their relationship is put in the form of an interesting image : 'he clung to her in his sleep as a baby kangaroo does to its mother.'

This pagan, whose only loyalty is to the corn-producing earth, once in hunger, rapes her by harvesting and eating her unripe corn, and dies of cholera. This character, it is obvious, is a class by himself.

Shamsuddin Abul Kalam creates some situations shedding interesting light on the moral attitude of certain characters. Fuljan a young widow of peasant stock, after carefully preserving her chastity for years, gives her honour to two men, one a policeman and the other the village headman, in order to secure a peaceful life for Ainuddin, an erring character and her childhood's companion, whom she plans to marry, for happiness had once eluded her. Jobeda in *Kashbaner Kanya* leaves her husband after five years of unhappy married life, comes back to her once jilted lover, gives herself to him and then rather mysteriously goes back to her unloving cruel, husband. In *Bandar* there is amazing restraint for a peasant in Keramat's treatment of his wife, whom he loves, when he discovers her adultery. The middle class husband in *Jugejuge* whose wife leaves him for another man, accepts her when she comes back.

All these characters reveal qualities of mind which are individual, and therefore cut across the difference of social background. It is however true that Fuljan would be regarded as an exceptional character in any society. As a middle class woman she would have perhaps been a cynical character, for then she would not have been so helpless before forces of oppression.

Mahbubul Alam in *Momener Jabanbandi*, Abul Mansur Ahmed in *Jiban Khudha*, Daulatennessa in *Pather Parash*, Abu Rushd and Akbar Husain, have given us pictures of lower middle class and middle class life. It would, I think, be correct to say that only the middle and upper classes of contemporary society have consciously formulated, intellectually held, verbalized, notions of love.

Jiban Khudha, a novel over which the shadow of Knut Hamsun hovers to the disadvantage of the Bengali writer, suggests that man has a mystic hunger for life. It is mystic in the sense that it is far larger than the concrete satisfactions it demands.

The sexual aspect of the hunger seems to be illustrated by the hero's two acts of love,—is a contrast intended ?—at the beginning and at the end of the novel. Halim's first wife, whose thoughts do not rise above her need for security, does not fulfil his superior intellectual and emotional needs. His second wife—the first one is not divorced—we are told, does.

Daulatennessa's *Pather Parash* has a courageous thing to say about the relation of man and woman, although it is not fully stated. The heroine Nina is a character to whom happen some of the most terrible things that could happen to a woman including violation. She is thrown by circumstances into the company of a man who is the soul of decent humanity and calls him, in the absence of a name, 'shujan' or the good man. The nature of their relationship is revealed years afterwards by a remark of the hero of the novel who is in love with Nina and wants her to marry him : 'You loved Shujan, and so, you did not hesitate to live with him.'

This indeed is a courageous suggestion for a woman novelist to make in our society.

The Begum in *Jiban Khudha*, an unconventional character, now stereotyped in literature, bore children to a man she loved but to whom she was not married. Rokeya in Akbar Husain's *Abanchhita* did not feel in the least degraded for giving birth to a son in consequence of a love affair which did not end in marriage. The view is advocated that life begotten in marriage or outside is from God and is innately beautiful and pure. The author is anxious to see 'chaste desire' triumph over social morality. All this, though somewhat belated in our literature, indicates, a desire to view human situations with understanding and to accept them with human discrimination.

The sensuality of characters in a yet-to-be-completed novel, called *Aranya Ratri* ('Shabar Patrika', Nos. 1 and 2, 1958) by a little known young man, reminds me of characters in certain English novels written against the background of the twenties and the middle thirties who believed in the cult of 'self-expression' (which meant unlimited sexual indulgence) and who made sex no more or less than an indoor, sometimes an outdoor, amusement and quite often a refuge from boredom. This picture of life is however by no means common or typical in our fiction.

In *Momener Jabanbandi* which is not, strictly speaking, a novel, there is a spirited affirmation of monogamous idealism. The monogamous ideal has always been somewhat vulnerable in Muslim society, though the prevailing

marital norm is 'the one spouse'. Momen or the believer is pulled back from temptations when he all but succumbs and returns to his wife whom he worships. Mahbubul Alam in *Mafijan* created some memorable sexual types ; for this reason and because he is a writer of wisdom and great delicacy of perception, he would deserve more attention later.

In the peasant community as well as in unlit places of middle class society in the city there are many men and women to whom love is synonymous with the act of love. The middle class idealism of our writers seems on the whole chary of drawing them. A city representative of this class makes, in one of Abu Rushd's short stories, an interesting mental comment on middle class love :

"It is a luxury of the gentlemen—they must choose before they would marry. This they call love. They think it a sin to marry the girl you are not in love with."

The remark is a concise statement of the 'romantic' basis of marriage, free choice and the accident of falling in love. This is a new development in our society, and is undoubtedly connected with the growth of Western individualism. It includes some, not all, of the attitudes of Western romanticism. The miseries of Shahed, and he is fairly typical, in Shamsuddin's *Dui Hridayer Tir* are caused by the failure of precisely this fulfilment.

A familiar feature of the romantic treatment of sex in Western literature is the tendency to deify, that is, to ascribe to man 'the Perfection that belongs to the non-human'. It would be seen that the picture of sexual love we find in contemporary fiction shows no such tendency. Our culture, on the whole, maintains the precision of human relations by keeping the human and the divine clearly apart. A comparison between a mature product of this culture and an English novelist who is a fine specimen of democratic liberal culture where man has usurped the place of the transcendental ultimate, would illustrate my point. What follows is a comparison of the states of two cultures and not of two writers as artists.

Mahbubul Alam's *Momener Jabanbandi* records the life of a believer in the middle class rural Muslim community before and after the First World War with such understanding, truth and beauty that it is likely to be a classic of its type in our literature. The believer expresses his ecstatic regard for the rich humanity of a woman thus :

"I went to her with a sense of hurt. It had taken three years of tribulation to win her. I found the crazy girl against whom I nourished a grievance no more. This was a fully flowered woman. Like Shiba I felt a desire to throw myself down that wherever she stepped it might be upon my breast. Every bit of her was alive, as if every separate particle had itself grown into womanhood and was brimming with its own glory. Putting her hand into mine this woman said, 'The palms of your hands have hardened'.

'For three years I have striven for hardness,' I answered.

'What have you done these three years ?' I asked.

'Said prayers'.

Those old prayers ! I wanted to laugh.

"The woman said, 'I have not allowed myself to feel enmity towards anyone these three years lest it cause some misfortune to happen to you. At first I prayed for your safety and happiness at the *monajat*. But that by itself did not satisfy me. Now I pray for the safety and happiness of everyone in the world, of others as well as of myself. This fills my heart.'

" What became of my grievance ? It seemed to me that I had merely pushed guns abroad while this woman, sitting at home, had discovered the kingdom of her heart."

Although Mahbubul Alam expresses his hero's worship of his wife in terms of the devotion of Mahadeba the Hindu god, he has his eyes fixed on her human lineaments.

I should now refer to a well known passage in E. M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* where he presents a wounded man in the arms of a woman who is not only a goddess but occasions a religious 'conversion' and thus 'saves' him :

"All through the day Miss Abbott had seemed to Philip like a goddess... (his) head was laid upon her breast. Her eyes were open, full of infinite pity and full of mystery, as if, they discerned the boundaries of sorrow, and saw unimaginable tracts beyond. Such eyes he had seen in great pictures but never in a mortal. Her hands were folded round the sufferer, stroking him lightly, for even a goddess can do no more than that. And it seemed fitting, too, that she should bend her head and touch his forehead with her lips.

"Philip looked away, as he sometimes looked away from the great pictures where visible forms suddenly became inadequate for the things they have shown to us. He was happy ; he was assured that there was greatness in the world. He would try henceforth to be worthy of the things she had revealed. Quietly, without hysterical prayers or banging of drums, he underwent conversion. He was saved."

Forster renders the outlines of human relations perilously imprecise. He deifies Caroline Abbott and presents Philip's experience as a religious one in terms of Christian conversion and salvation. Incidentally, those who have read Forster's novel know that Caroline owes her transfiguration, consequently Philip his conversion, to the frustration of her physical desire for the Latin, sensual, Gino.

The reason for all this is of course that Forster's religion has lost its proper object, whereas Mahbubul Alam is, I should like to think, saved from extravagance by his unconscious religious disipline. In our cultural milieu, the fundamental instinct for the Deity is, for many, still normally satisfied. Here religion is not wholly spilt and is contained by its proper object, that is, the supernatural ultimate. It does not usually invade the mortal category of human love. It must be made clear however that the suppression or failure of religion does not necessarily make love romantic. It could become, as easily, purely animal and vitalistic as in so many of Huxley's novels and

in Margiad Evans. Although the relation between religion and romanticism is not, in my view, strictly speaking, one of friendship, both forces have been under attack. The odds against the religious view of life are great in our society too and writers like Mahbubul Alam could become a curiosity of the past.

I must add that E. M. Forster is not typical of British culture at the moment. There is a significant affirmation of the religious view of life in writers as different from one another as Christopher Fry, Graham Greene and C. S. Lewis, among others.

It would be seen that, by and large, our writers show a very restricted interest in sex. They are concerned either with the distress of sex or its most obvious frustrations, and are unaware of any deeper psychological or social implications of it. Mahbubul Alam and Shahed Ali however seem to be exceptions in that the former presents two memorable women in *Mafijan* and the latter a singularly fascinating character in *Oi je Nil Akash*, all studies showing remarkable penetration and insight.

A critic mentions D. H. Lawrence in connection with *Mafijan*. The really Lawrentian character in the story is not Mafi but Chhabi. Mafi would have been considered by Lawrence too intellectual, because her mind registers too much and that too consciously. She is the type of person 'who would walk into the jaws of death and watch its teeth as it crushes her.' Chhabi's knowledge is tactual rather than a matter of the mind. In this she is like many Lawrentian men and women of whom Ursula in the *Rainbow* is typical. If Mafi is to be compared with any Lawrentian character it must be with Gudrun in *Women In Love*, who is one of Lawrence's unlawrentian women, whose irrepressible mind would not sink into the 'abyss' of the unconscious. Mafi has a conscious intellectual interest in her experience ; at the same time she is eager to live in the fullness of the body, a desire which has been frustrated more than once. Her portrait has therefore a remarkable interest for us as a character.

On the night of her wedding, after her first union with her husband, who must leave the following morning, Mafi, who had known thwarted love once before lies awake and thinks, sad at the prospect of a long separation which turned out to be permanent. She knows that she will have to return to this single memory of pleasure during her long dreary waiting. So she turns it over in her mind and notes, almost with scientific precision, its highest moment. Her thoughts of course end in the prayer for a child with whom she could fill the gap of her husband's absence. In the course of all this the author uses half a sentence which has been objected to as obscene. But her reflection is so perfectly true to situation and character that I am unable to call it obscene. The detail in question, on the contrary, realizes the character of a woman in a given situation. I should like to quote, as close a parallel to this as I could find, from a great contemporary French writer, to show how truth of character and situation justifies such details. In Jean Paul Sartre's story, *Intimacy*, an unhappy frigid woman, married to an impotent husband whom she loves, leaves him and spends an evening with another man in a hotel but has no pleasure in the affair. She says to herself :

"My God, to think that's life, that is why you get dressed and wash and make yourself pretty and all the books are written about that and you think about it all the time and finally that is what it is, you go to a room with somebody, who half smothers you and ends up by wetting your belly."

Mafi, according to her creator, is something of an experimentalist. She is something of an educational psychologist too. Speaking more seriously, and in human terms, the manner in which she helped the blossoming of a child's instincts by letting him play, in her pretended sleep with her body and the strange fulfilment she had from it, is one of the most curious, amazing and delicate things in our literature. This is the very heart of the story. The child is her only support, the only possible means of sustenance, in the dreary absence of her husband. She clings to him and takes an artist's delight in satisfying the limitless wonder and curiosity of a child's mind, and she gives him lessons with her beautiful body as text, which is compared to an ocean with waves breaking upon the shore and again to a bursting 'Keya' flower. And yet in all this there is not a suggestion of prurience.

What does this woman bring to the child ? Is it a message from sources of life beyond consciousness, beyond words ? And what does she receive from him ? The fructifying sense that she has stimulated the roots of a plant ? Mahbubul Alam and his heroine seem to have learnt their boldness from the tradition of the puthis,—of this there is evidence in this story—but what a sublimation of that tradition is *Mafijan.*

In Pir Borhanuddin Mahbubul Alam has created a memorable character, a picture of gross libido and a crass mind from whom the outraged Mafi's sensibilities shrink. But wonder of wonders, her body begins to respond to this Caliban. The author conveys the revelation in fine prose, which contains in almost every sentence an arresting image, and adequately renders the lyrical element in the situation.

It will be remembered that I likened Mafi to an unlawrentain character in Lawrence. I wish now to develop my suggestion further and say, without in the least suggesting a comparison of the achievements of the two writers in any other respect, that Mahbubul Alam's Mafi is a wiser conception than Lawrence's typical characters. My reason for this claim is that her normality, that is her natural balance between body and mind, is in contrast with the frenzied emphasis Lawrence puts on the body alone.

Shahed Ali, the author of *Jibrailer Dana*, presents in *Oi je Nil Akash*, the fascinating study of a woman, rapt in the trance of her beauty, having a mystic relation with the colour blue which she wore all the time on her person. She has a firm youth, apparently timeless, and is out of sympathy with the unlovely in any form, including her own unlovely child. Her prayer is to die before the end of her youth and beauty. Her feeling of kindred is with blue because that is the colour of her mind and the infinite sky where she wishes to live for ever, like a star, beyond change and decay, looking at the perishing world of man from afar. In short, her tragedy was that of a being who refused to accept the creaturely limitations of existence in a material body. She took her own life, but in death, after twenty years of marriage, her incredible beauty was still like a 'tightened bow'.

She adored the child Shidu, her husband's young cousin of eight, because he had something of her beauty. Shidu's feelings for his sister-in-law have been ridiculed as being impossible in a child of eight. But is it so ridiculous or incredible ? This is by no means unknown in life or literature, even our literature. Think of 'khoka' in *Mafijan*. There are memorable examples in Western literature. Dante fell in love with Beatrice when both were nine. Do we ridicule Dante when he writes of his experience of first seeing her thus : "At that moment, I say most truly that the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith." Is it merely Dante's great name that preserves him from laughter ? The answer to this is found in a respectable writer's comment on Dante's experience : "the type of *sexual experience* which Dante describes as occurring to him at the age of nine years is by no means impossible or unique. My only doubt (in which I found myself confirmed by a distinguished psychologist) is whether it could have taken place so late in life as the age of nine years." Quite on another plane in a poem by Eliot called *Dans le Restaurant* a boy of seven, at the first stirring of sex, makes love with a girl younger than he.

I trust I need not tell my audience that in the foregoing passage no comparison was intended between the abilities of the writer of *Oi Je Nil Akash* and Dante. I merely wanted to establish that the situation in his story was not incredible. Shahed Ali perceives and realizes the poetry of the situation well. The poetic atmosphere of his stories is a distinct value. While Mahbubul Alam gives us finely differentiated characters Shahed Ali adds a refreshing element to the short story in East Pakistan. Poetry enters the short story in his hands much more satisfactorily than in Azad's. The writer of the short story must however be on his guard against adventitious poetry and incoherence.

It is perhaps not satisfactory critical procedure to refer to or quote, as I am aware I have done, from works which are poor in quality. Ideas are not valid if they are not artistically established. The chief fault of writers like Abul Mansur Ahmad is that in them ideas are merely stated, not rendered. Not all the implications of his notion of the 'hunger for life' are realised. At the end of the novel Halim, the hero, is a contented person. His post-coitus reflection on the 'hunger for life' somehow makes one feel that he has really had a very ordinary experience. In fact, although a lot happens to the character, the author has not succeeded in giving him just the pressure of experience that could have put him beyond doubt. An air of unreality hangs over the work written in unnatural and sometimes unliterary prose. He has not been able to reconcile the claims of beauty with local realism. Few of his important characters come alive though some minor ones vividly do. Lutfan's cheerful readiness to share her husband's bed with his first wife produces much less conviction in us than Shamsuddin's Jeenat in *Dui Hridayer Tir* who refuses to marry the adoring, unhappy, Shahed because he has another wife.

Owing to the same lack of integral conception, the intensity that informs the part as well as the whole, a large number of our novels, including Abul

Fazal's *Ranga Prabhat* and Daulatennessa's *Pather Parash* are so unsatisfactory as works of art. Daulatennessa, who like Abul Fazal and the author of *Jar Bhagye Ja Chhilo*, draws Hindu and Muslim characters, gives us one or two sharp sketches. Structurally, her novel is loose and episodic and sometimes shows too obvious contrivance.

Shamsuddin creates a large number of sexual situations in his works. I partly discussed Fuljan in *Anek Diner Asha* earlier. The author should have found some way of making the compulsion of her circumstances and her conflict more convincing. The sudden reversal of her hope, for which she parted with her honour, would then have roused greater sympathy. I hold the last three lines of the story a blemish. It still is a good story, but is the raw material of a better one. His other stories suffer either because of an unnecessary offensive detail, as in *Bajra*, the terrible story of a brother meeting in the prostitute with whom he spends the night his sister lost during the Great Famine, or a disproportionate interest in the physical element, as in *Durjog*, a gross story of brutish violation of an unfortunate girl. Shamsuddin's shallowest work is to be found in his portrait of Selina in *Dui Mahal*. He credits this girl, educated in an English convent, with no better art as a seductress than the street girls in *Saiful Mulk Badiujjamal*. Apart from his occasional failures, his aim in making use of sexual themes is dramatic and human.

Shamsuddin's *Kashbaner Kanya*, which feelingly captures the beauty of the flooded southern region of Bengal, contains a picture of sexual union which is quite bold in our fiction. The man, a virgin, is however, presented as an outrageously garrulous imbecile. The episode is crudely treated and exposes the author to the charge of incoherent motivation in respect of the subsequent conduct of the woman. Is the portrait of Shikdar meant to be a foil to the behaviour of Asghar, Jobeda's husband, who, incidentally, resembles Pir Borhanuddin in no small measure ?

Syed Waliullah seems, in comparison, perfect in his understanding of character and situation. In *Lal Shalu* Majid, in his ruthless career of fraud, is momentarily drawn to a woman, whom he finds, one night, giving his wife a hand in heating paddy in the yard. He watches her form against the flame of the oven, withdraws, then comes back and calls his wife. She recognises the inflexion of that voice, and when she comes back to her job, she is unable to meet her friend's eyes.

Azad has in an accentuated form, Shamsuddin's vice of not leaving much to the reader's wit. Both writers exploit to the full the familiar villains of the village economy. It is all right as it goes. One would however like to see them grapple with evil in a more substantial form as they are growing older. Incidentally, it seems that according to Azad the sexual union of a socially undesirable couple is somehow more ridiculous, as in *Chaya Mriga* than that of others. The woman in his work, guilty of incest, is characteristically the wife of a Haji and a blackmarketeer who appears to have qualified for this to happen to him by his two vocations.

Akbar Husain, a writer of an inferior order, makes the novel an occasion for producing as many prurient situations as possible out of a given theme.

Although he has been commended for his 'rational' attitude to problems of sex, he still writes with less than a minimum of the novelist's art.

In the opening section of my talk I suggested that our erotic tradition is strongly biased towards the body. This bias is, as we have seen, fully illustrated in contemporary fiction by the picture of peasant and middle-class love presented by our writers.

This does not mean that there are no other strains in it. Such a suggestion would be palpably incorrect, seeing that man is at once body and soul, senses, mind and will. They are set in their proper place in the personality, but perhaps not in a sealed hierarchy. Whatever the religious view of human relations, attitudes do get mixed up in practice. All I suggest is that the Muslim mind does not easily deify, though it knows the tendency to idealize. Laily and Majnu are popular symbols in our culture. In no version of the story I know is Laily a mortal made into a goddess. On the contrary, the anxiety to keep the outlines of human relations clear view this story of inordinate love of one human being for another as a fable of man's quest for God, in which Laily is no more than an idea and Majnu a mental state.

I have suggested that the peasant, the lower class, mind in our fiction is in full sympathy with the physical ideal. The middleclass psyche too, though capable of ambivalence, being familiar with the tradition of European humanism, individualism and romanticism—all connected phenomena—with the ritualizing tendency of Baishnabism and with Tagore's *Shesher Kabita*, among other things, on the whole accepts it. This ambivalence, as a study of a dozen or so contemporary Muslim writers confirms, seems more characteristic of three or four decades ago. The hero of Abul Fazal's *Chouchir*, a fine story written about 1925, clings, after the frustration of his desire to unite with the girl he has long been in love with, to a bodiless ideal of love, but recognizes at her death how deeply he longs for his beloved in the body. Nothing of this is in evidence in the writers discussed in this paper. To middleclass ambivalence the materialist and scientific attitudes have long been an antidote. Muslim writers then are, within the limits suggested, free from the romantic confusion except in a poetic metaphor here or an instance of extravagance there.

To study our love literature however is to be aware of the limitation of our erotic tradition. Romantic love as a carnalization of man's feeling for God has been admittedly a most potent force in Western culture since the Renaissance. This impulse is in its literary expression a wholly inordinate worship of some mere created thing, accompanied by an unappeasable passion and a tormenting sense of the dichotomy of the spirit and the body. It has, in acceptance and reaction, lent great intensity and variety to English literature during the past few centuries. The reaction that it has stimulated in twentieth century Western fiction is extremely various. Margiad Evans, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell and Maugham, among others, represent related features of this reaction. Our largely worldly and sensual attitude has not produced a comparable reaction in the opposite direction. Although

dissatisfaction with the contractual, business-like, nature of Muslim marriage, to which Roushan in *Chouchir* draws pointed attention, is occasionally in evidence, it never created the kind of antithesis, in our time, that 'marriage of convenience' did in Europe in the Middle Ages in the form of courtly love. I am however fully aware that such things are not matters of prescription by anyone.

We have seen that Muslims accept the body unequivocally. This good thing, among the few in our society, has also the vice of its virtue. The West's preoccupation with the sinfulness of the body, revolts against which are legion, has not been wholly unfortunate in art. The puritan disregard of the body and its consequent undervaluation produced the noble rage of a D. H. Lawrence, and the Latin response of a Forster.

The purdah system was a repressive force in sections of Muslim society, and was a disadvantage to the writers of fiction, but it is not known to have created the ecstasy which constraints upon passionate love did in Victorian England. It is well known that love acquired a strange power and intensity in those days, and that in the absence of acknowledged outlets became almost a transcendental aspiration. This was a gain for Victorian literature, but impediments in the way of love have brought no such gain to our literature. Whenever the human spirit suffers, the result is welcome for literature. We do not seem to have suffered much.

It is always pertinent to ask how much of our life is articulated in our literature. If one turns from a study of contemporary Western fiction to our fiction one is struck by the inability of our writers to communicate adult physical experience. There seems to be little interest in the knowledge of the body and in rendering its raptures. A writer I admire once said that it is one of the most difficult things on earth to remember the sensations of the body and therefore to realize them effectively in literature. Our writers do not seem to be much interested in this artistic challenge.

Similarly, they are either unwilling or unable to peer into the dark mysteries of sex. The naturalism of writers like Alauddin Al-Azad, Shamsuddin Abul Kalam and Showkat Osman, does not go deep enough, for what they have learnt from the West is merely a surface frankness. These writers write as if Freud, Jung and Adler never existed. It is also doubtful whether naturalism as a literary technique, as practised in the West, could be sustained in a society which does not enjoy its sexual freedom and sophistication. It must however be noted that one does not find in our fiction any really striking picture of the lyrical, tender, aspect of love either.

There are certain situations too which our writers do not yet face squarely. I am thinking of situations arising out of fornication, incest, and extramarital relationship, situations well known in life but harshly treated. The dramatic and psychological possibilities of such situations are ignored. Nor does one come across anywhere in contemporary fiction a satisfactory picture of the sexual relations of men and women who practise the ideal of plural marriage, although the comical and the inhuman aspects of it have been exploited by Showkat Osman and Waliullah in their stories. The author of *Jiban Khudha* denies us such a picture by making his hero unwilling to see

the face of his first wife and by making his college educated heroine accept the situation in advance.

There are certain feminine types, again well known in life, and psychologically of great interest, who are not represented in our fiction. They include the Femme Fatale, that is, the irresistible woman who is harder to escape than doom ; the Medea type, who would rather go up in flames than be crossed in her wishes, and finally, the woman with the pluralist attitude, not uncommon in society. This latter has been a most fascinating figure in English fiction from Thackeray's Becky Sharp to Maugham's Rosie.

It is evident therefore that there is in our writers a great deal of hesitation and evasion. The hesitation might have something to do with the fear of the obscene. But if there is anything that the author of *Ulysses* has taught practitioners of the craft of fiction it is this : if the writer has an aim transcending the physical facts he portrays and if that aim succeeds, he could *not* be called obscene. Since it is usually the failure of the aim that makes such portrayal obscene, he has to take the trouble not to fail. I recall here a scene in a novel by J. G. Cozzens, an American writer of great power and wisdom, in which a married woman, who has for years planned to seduce a married man, comes to comfort him on the morning of the death of his wife, to whom he was deeply attached, and imperceptibly sets about accomplishing her end on the deceased's very bed. The man, brought to self-awareness from his passive, incurious state of grief by a sudden ringing of the telephone, discovers, in the too unmistakable response of his body, unplumbed, unnamed abysses in himself. Is this giddying, horrifying knowledge of the amoral darkness in man obscene ?

BENGALI AS A VEHICLE OF ABSTRACT THOUGHT

Hasan Zaman

LANGUAGE is the most significant and wonderful mechanism that has ever been evolved by the spirit of man. It is the intuitive science of human experience and transforms experience into concepts. Thought is impossible without speech and *vice versa*, because the two are "facets of the same diamond."

Creative thinking consists in the process of imagination, the highest type of psychological activity patterned out of human experiences and strivings. Imagination or abstraction is an acquired possession of individuals and "has the main share in the discovery of novel knowledge" through new tensions, patterns, operations and theorizations. There is in our apparatus of reception an inherent tendency to organize the sensory field into "groups and patterns of sense-data, to perceive forms rather than a flux of light impressions. This unconscious appreciation of forms is the primitive root of all abstraction, which in turn is the keynote of rationality".[1] From rationality springs the science of Logic, the science of the most complete abstractions, and philosophy, an attempt to see the parts of reality in relation to the whole. When an individual cannot think in the abstract, he is incompetent to think about problems that go beyond his immediate environments. It is only in abstract thought that he will be able to use all the different vehicles of thinking.

Language has a vital part to play in creative thinking, in expressing or making articulate the concepts of logic, philosophy, and science. The faculty (not the form) of language being innate in man, the degree of the progress of language is indicative of the intellectual development of a people. The needs of the primitive man were comparatively simple and limited. Naturally, the number of vocables possessed by him was also comparatively small. With progress in thought, abstractions reached new heights of intensity and breadth, and "dim clouds of ideas" were more and more "condensed into a shower of words".

Abstractions of a higher nature and intellectual work of great significance are the *sine qua non* of a developed culture. But philosophical reflections and abstract expressions are necessarily obscure. It is said that philosophers suffer invariably from obscurity of expression due perhaps to their inability to express themselves or the inadequacy of words employed. Naturally, understanding the contention of philosophers, the very meaning of their writings, becomes a formidable problem, let alone the quest of truth. Even a great historian like Macaulay failed to understand the English version of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason because of the abstract nature of the subject matter and the obscurity of this philosopher's mode of expression.

Now if abstract thought seems so obscure in a developed language like English, the position of the Bengali language today, as a vehicle of abstract

thought, may easily be imagined. It is, however, true that Bengali has drawn upon different lingual sources for its vocabulary. But it has not been able to keep pace with developments in different domains of human thought and lags far behind as a perfect and efficient instrument of abstract thought. Undue repetition and exaggeration tend to make statements obscure. Confusion and lack of uniformity in the use of words, absence of a developed terminology and lack of new experience in the mode of expression have paralysed the evolution of the Bengali language. An example may be cited to clarify the point. The word "Niti" is used to denote now "morality", then "principles" and again "theory". It will be very difficult for a young reader and particularly for a foreigner to understand the different uses of the word. The use of such abstract words and expressions in Bengali is mostly vague, fluid, and undirected.

Relatively speaking, Bengali compares favourably with many other languages of the world. It is "a well cultivated and expressive speech". It is the seventh great world language and is one of the most developed among the Indo-Aryan group of languages. It is, however, alleged that owing to the slow (and unhurried) life-process in Bengal, Bengalees are inured to haphazard and trackless thinking and seem to be too lazy to think out the full implications of their ideas. Concentration and highly sustained thought are beyond the reach of the Bengali mind. Laziness of thought, it is said, has created in them a psychology of non-acceptance of the new and the novel and a suspicion of ideas that upset their complacency. Most of them instinctively keep away from a subject that demands time, exertion and mental effort.

One may naturally wonder if the Bengali mind is responsible for such poverty of expression in language. The rich abundance of crops, a variable climate, the green trees, plains and fields and luxurious vegetation in Bengal have their benumbing effect on the Bengali temperament. If we venture to accept the thesis of geographical determinists like Buckle and Montesquieu, we may come to consider climate as the supreme factor in human civilization and culture. It is a truism to say that an extreme climate saps human vitality and a temperate climate quickens it. But the development of language is directly a problem of mental culture and technique and not that of climatic influences. Language as a technique, a competence and skill is an acquired disposition or habit. From the cultural history of the Bengali language "it is impossible to show that the form of the language has the slightest connection with national temperament" (or climate). The emotional aspect of our psychic life is but meagrely expressed in the build of our language. [2]

Abstract thought in Bengali received its first inspiration from Sanskrit. The first Bengali philosophical work was a treatise on Tantric worship by Chandidas (*Chaita Rupa Prapto*) and was followed by a book on Baishnaba theology by Rupa Goswami (*Karika*). The original prose patterns of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar were sanskritized, chaste and elegant, but verbose, slow-moving, woolly and artificial. Bengali prose became a vehicle of rationalism and empiricism in the hands of Ram Mohan Roy, Dwarakanath

Thakur, Debendra Nath Thakur, Shib Nath Shastri and others. The impact of Islam and Sufism on them has also been fruitful. Pyari Chand Mitra (Tek Chand Thakur) and Kali Prasanna Sinha sought to combine for the first time Sanskritized language with the spoken language of Bengal. Bankim Chandra, Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya, Haraprasad Shastri and others contributed to the development of Bengali as an instrument of abstract thought. The same type of prose was developed by Muslim writers such as Munshi Mehrullah, Maulana Muniruzzaman Islamabadi, Muzammil Huq, Dr. Lutfur Rahman and others.[3]

The introduction of colloquialism by Rabindranath and Pramatha Chowdhury proved that serious thought could be successfully clothed and effectively expressed in a standard, colloquial language. Literary language and spoken language were so perfectly blended by them that Bengali, freed from the heavy chains of rigid words and expressions, acquired a new ease and individuality. In the domain of pure philosophy, however, the sway of chaste literary language still remained undisputed.[4] Recently colloquialisms have been successfully used in philosophical writing by Humayun Kabir, Abu Sayeed Ayub, Devi Prasad Chattopadhyaya and others.

A glance at the history of the Bengali language will show that in the domain of creative art, Bengalees have excelled in lyrical poetry only. In epic, drama or philosophy they have always been off the mark. Their creative work has been more like natural flowers by the road side. It has not taken the form of sustained effort of analysis and investigation. In contrast to English, which is strong, sharp and full of adventure, the Bengali language has been reflective, sentimental and musical.

Compared with the English language, Bengali, however, possesses some relieving qualities. English has no compound letters. If a definite sound is to be represented in English a greater number of letters are to be used than in Bengali, and more time is needed to combine these letters. In Bengali we have the double advantage of quick recognition and economy of space as complex sound can be rendered easily. Nevertheless, these facilities of expression are marred by *faults* already mentioned, that is, sentimentalism, repetition, slowness of movement even where quickness is not impossible, as well as by the limited use of complex syntax and the lack of a new terminology. The tortoise-like movement of traditional Bengali prose makes it vague, verbose and often sentimentally off the mark.

Again, the growth of concise and exact writing on philosophy has been made difficult by the restricted use of complex sentences. Complex sentences are more prolific in English than in Bengali. Generally speaking, complex sentences in Bengali are apt to be resolved into simple or less complex sentences. The Bengali language excels in narration and simple description. But the habit of abstract thought is a thing yet to be cultivated in Bengali. Moreover, when compression of thought is attempted through words, one invariably falls back upon "tatshama" words : and because of the latter's rigidity, such words cannot gain popular acceptance amongst our writers. It would be advisable, therefore, to evolve words out of "tatbhaba" Prakrit

and foreign sources as far as possible and to prefer a word like "phota" to "parishphuta."

Language, as a skill, is conditioned by society. All languages are skills of tongues used to express meaning, and meaning is more or less successfully expressed according as the skill is more or less perfect.[5] Language emanates from "the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs". The growth or borrowing of new words is indicative of the formal trends of lingual culture. A society that has no knowledge of Physics, has no word to denote it. It is the range of man's experience, knowledge and technical development that makes and remakes a language.

The technical aspect of the problem of development of Bengali has to do with the development of new sciences and philosophy. The development of a new vocabulary will help keep imagination in step with scientific investigation and philosophical advancement. Since the mother tongue has already been introduced as the medium of instruction up to the graduation standard developing a suitable terminology has become imperative.

With a view to grappling with the shortcomings of the Bengali language as an instrument of abstract thought, habits of more disciplined, sustained and complex thinking are to be cultivated. This will involve first, newer and fresher experiments with the language and second, the evolution of an appropriate terminology, modifying old phrases and coining new ones. This will go a long way toward giving expression to new notions, concepts, implements, arts and human relations. The Bengali language is to shake off its present slavery to rigid and petrified habits of thought. More effective thinking on particular problems through an improved art of thought should be our motto. Bengali will then be able to discover fresh points of intellectual departure. The aim of the art of thought will be to evolve "a language whose emotional association may provide intellectual stimulus and a more exact literary language with fewer emotional associations."[6] Lastly, we must make our social life more disciplined and better organised. And this is expected to contribute toward moulding our habits properly. We must be habituated to more orderly ways of living and conscious of the inevitability of change.

Languages are not immutable things. They are ever in a state of flux. Keeping ourselves fully abreast of the present needs and future prospects of Bengali, we must try to control its development as far as possible. The development of concepts, the development of language and the ability to think are interrelated. So this conscious evolution will only be possible by utilising and adapting various kinds of words already in existence, mainly derived from its different dialects. The different dialects of Northern, Middle and Eastern areas of East Pakistan and words of foreign origin may help remove the shortcomings of our language. New words may be evolved analogically out of word-patterns already in existence : for example, "gananirdharan" or referendum on the pattern of "gananirbachan" or popular election ; on the pattern of "shamajbad" or "fashibad" (fascism), sharbbattakbad (totalitarianism). English is so remarkable in this respect because its vocabulary includes words borrowed from almost every language of the world.

Though the degree of development of the Bengali language is not adequate for conveying modern knowledge, we must remember that in the past it did not prove completely inadequate to express abstract thought. It was the vehicle of the philosophy of Buddhism, Jainism and Baishnabism. It may be recalled that Atish Dipakar, a Bengali, went to Tibet in order to preach the gospels of Buddhism. It will not, therefore, be too much to expect that Bengali, properly evolved, will be able to meet the needs of the day.

The future prospects of Bengali as a vehicle of abstract thought are, therefore, by no means dark. Its original link with Sanskrit, a language of profound richness and infinite variety, and its later contact with the very rich Arabic, Persian, English and other foreign languages, have sharpened and vitalized it from time to time. Quite a large number of Sanskrit words have long been observed in Bengali. The Bengali language proved itself very prompt in assimilating English, Arabic and Persian literatures. The same spirit of creative assimilation is to be extended more and more to the language of intellectual thought. The mixed and hybrid nature of Bengali is indicative of its strength and inner vitality. A balanced assimilation of foreign words and technical terms will have a tonic effect on the language if we can really brace ourselves up to creative work. Pramatha Chowdhury had recognized this.

In cases, where Sanskrit words will serve our purpose well, there is however no reason why we should hesitate to adopt them. The same is true of Arabic, Persian and other foreign languages. Thus we should adopt "ganatantra" rather than "jamhuria" as our Bengali equivalent of "republic." And "jahir o batin" will be a far better rendering of "appearance and reality" than "maya o shatya". There are thousands of words which have been ostracized from the dictionary of the Bengali language and from the language of literature. These have to be revived and put to effective use. As has been well put by Devaprasad Sarbadhikari :

"With the field of research daily expanding the question of its vehicle must come to the fore. No country has done real research work on a large scale and with lasting results that has been handicapped by the language difficulty as we have been."[8]

The controversy between the standard literary and the standard colloquial language has often obstructed creative thought. Literary language is grave, aristocratic and beautiful. But since most words end in vowels it is lamentably slow and halting. The colloquial language, on the other hand, is playful, realistic and shorn of all exaggeration and easily understood. Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath, Pramatha Chowdhury, Humayun Kabir, Abu Sayeed Ayub and Devi Prasad Chattopadhyaya have shown how serious philosophical subjects can be tackled successfully in a colloquial mode of expression. "The really great creative thinker is one who is able to achieve the deliberate balance between adherence to many of the conventions of his art or science and the disregard of others."[9]

Time was when even the translators of the *Holy Quran* and those of the *Mahabharata* were dubbed dangerous elements in society. Every new

birth is attended with some pain and every creative act oversteps the established order of things. A new thing is likely to appear eccentric to many. Similar is the case with colloquialism. Colloquialism in literature is justified from the standpoint of democratic education. Even writers and philosophers like Plato, Aristophanes and Demosthenes did not ignore spoken language altogether and it is from their writings that colloquial Greek has been preserved down to our own day. "One will remember what he gets from an equal where his master's words are forgotten."[10]

The limitations of colloquial language are, however, obvious. The playfulness of the spoken tongue inhibits deep and serious thinking. So we have to combine the literary and the colloquial to get a language which is balanced, reasoned and adequate but popular and intelligible. Where quickness is essential, colloquial speech will serve our purpose well. But where the language needs to be slow and grave, we may fall back more upon the literary pattern. The Bengali language must "gather enough speed to take off and enough height to reach its journey's end."[11]

Finally, I would like to make some suggestions.

First, the importance of translating books from other languages into Bengali. The necessity of translating philosophical and scientific works into Bengali cannot be overemphasised. It is only through translations that Bengali may initially be developed into a language of world culture. English is studied all over the world because all important works are available through it. Translations of some Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures as well as some Marxist classics are available in Bengali. Recently books on general knowledge, social science, physical science, philosophy and Islam have been, and are being, translated into Bengali in East Pakistan. Translations of the Holy Quran, Hadis and of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun, Farabi, Ghazzali, Ibn Sina, Einstein and other noted thinkers, scientists and philosophers, are overdue.

Second, we must guard against the danger of extreme abstractionism in thought and creation of "partial minds" (Yeats). The purpose of language and culture is to make life richer and more abundant. But the tragedy lies in the fact that the higher the material civilization of a people, the more monotonous is the pitch of its language. In a developed nation the naturalness of the simple emotional life vanishes.

Extreme abstractionism may leave vast areas of our experience unrecognized and unexpressed. We in East Pakistan have developed a sort of vague value-abstractionism without evolving a technique of abstract thought. This incapacity to express the pattern of our feeling is responsible for our distress. Semanticists may hold the narrow opinion that thought begins and ends with language (that is, discursive thought). But there is also non-discursive thought or thought expressed in non-lingual forms, lines, colours and proportion. "The limits of language are not the last limits of experience and things inaccessible to language may have their own forms of conception"[12] and mode of thought. Complex intellectualizations and sterilization of experience in the modern man have

led modern syndicalists like Griffuehels to advocate activism and proclaim "first conclusions and explosions and then reasoning." Truly is life larger than any of its particular experience, it is "larger surer and profounder than our syllogisms."[13] Hence the language of the brain has to be properly combined with the language of the heart in the process of developing the Bengali language.

NOTES

(1) Susanne K. Langer : *Philosophy in a New Key.*

(2) Edward Sapir : *Language*, Harcourt Brace and Co., New York, 1955

(3) Prominent writers in Bengali Prose :

Akhshoy Kumar Datta, Mrittunjoy Vidyalankar, Ram Ram Basu, Chandi Charan Munshi, Tarini Charan Mitra, Rajib Lochan Mukhopadhyaya, Haraprasad Roy, Goloknath Sharma, Kali Krishna Dev, Bhabani Charan Bandopadhyaya, Krishna Mohan Bandopadhyaya, Munshi Mehrullah, Muzzamil Huq, Mir Musharraf Husain, Dr. Lutfur Rahman, Yakub Ali Chowdhury, Maulana Muniruzzaman Islamabadi and others.

(4) Prominent writers on Philosophy : Chandranath Tarkalankar, Kailash Shiromoni, Rakhaldas Nayaratna, Dr. Brojendra Nath Shil, Hiralal Haldar, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya, Dr. Satish Chandra Vidyabhushan, Dr. Surendra Nath Das Gupta, Mahoopadhyaya Pramathanath Tarkabhushan, Tamibhushan Tarkabagish, Panchanan Tarkaratna, Ramendra Sundar Trivedi, Jagadish Chandra Basu, Rabindranath and the Muslim writers mentioned. A combination of eastern thought and western thought is found in Humayun Kabir, Abu Sayeed Ayyub, Devi Prasad Chattopadhyaya, Tarak Chandra Roy, Shashadhar Datta, Manoranjan Roy and others.

(5) Ibn Khaldun : *Muqaddima.*

(6) Graham Wallas : *The Art of Thought*, Thinkers' Library, 1949.

(7) Pramatha Chowdhury : *Sabuj Patra*, Baisakh, 1327 ; *Moslem Bharat.*

(8) Quoted in the Presidential address at the 20th session of Bangiya Shahitya Shammelan by Hirendra Nath Datta.

(9) Catherine Patrick : *What is Creative Thinking* ? Jaico Publication, 1957, p. 155.

(10) Rudyard Kipling : *Something of Myself*, 1937, Chapter 2, p. 155.

(11) Ariadne Antoniades, *Simplicity and Simplification, UN News*, October—December, 1951.

(12) Susanne K. Langer : *Philosophy in a New Key.*

(13) Will Durant : *The Mansions of Philosophy*, Ch. 2.

Munier Chowdhury

MR. Buddhadeva Bose in one of his essays expresses the opinion that Bengali prose, "in less than a couple of centuries, has achieved remarkable maturity. He, however, alleges that it has "yet notable deficiencies, deficiencies, I mean, not in performance, but in potency itself !" Reflecting on these supposed fundamental limitations of the Bengali language, he further says : "Bengali prose, therefore, is now all right for description, narration and dialogue, the accessory of fiction and *belles-lettres*, but seems just to fall short of speculative, critical and philosophical writing."

Had this been the opinion of an ignorant foreigner or that of an infatuated worshipper of foreign idols, we need not have taken it seriously. But this is the view of a writer among whose many achievements must be counted his astonishing ability to discuss difficult aesthetic questions in charming prose, and therefore, calls for comment at length.

As the question is about the limits of Bengali as a language and its inherent tendencies, the present discussion must keep in view the entire range of our prose literature. To my mind, that would be the best way of dispelling the misgiving of people who needlessly despair of the future of Bengali.

Ram Mohan Roy created a new epoch as a prose writer at a time when Bengali had not developed punctuation-marks or the notion of agreement between clauses, according to the genius of the language. His *Vedanta*, published in 1815, was the first step towards a fully blown and modern prose. This pioneering effort, naturally hesitant and unsure of itself, is significantly a work with a spiritual theme. Bengali prose thus made its beginning in the abstract realm of philosophy.

After twenty five years appeared Akshoy Dutt on an intellectual scene profoundly disturbed by the conflict between native culture and foreign culture. There was no hypocrisy or self-deception in the response of the times to new ideals and ideas of life. The impact of it all affected the very heart of society and the individual, and the resultant awakening was so deep and real that Bengalees avidly set about assimilating Western and Indian knowledge. In their attempt to know, not merely through English translation but at first hand, the best that has been thought in every language, they learnt Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit on the one hand and Latin, Greek, French and German on the other. It was this serious sense of purpose and scholarly pain that made possible the revolution in thought and language in the nineteenth century. Akshoy Dutt was important not only as a reformer of language but as an exponent of new ideas. His work entitled *Bajhya Bastu o Manab Prakriti* (Nature and Human Nature) does not merely contain a freight of information. His discussion of the laws of nature, the constitution of human nature, the question of human happiness, shows that Bengali had already acquired the power of logical analysis and of representing the complex structure of abstract thought.

The book, 'On Nature and Human Nature', is not a wholly original work. When, however, a great idea leavens, or a great change occurs in,

communal life and the individual is roused by his insight into it to make its significance clearer to himself and to others by studious effort, language, under the stress, discovers its possibilities. Dutt was aware that he had used words which were not easy for an ordinary English educated reader to understand. He, therefore, sought to remove the difficulty of such readers by adding to his work a glossary of the unfamiliar words with their English equivalents. In doing so his aim was to facilitate the study of Western science and philosophy through the medium of Bengali. His assumption was that his English educated audience understood the English equivalents he supplied, and for this reason he gave his alphabetical glossary, the caption : English Rendering of Words Compiled'. That he did not tentatively call it 'Proposed Bengali Equivalents of English Words' is also a proof of his great faith in the possibilities of the Bengali language.

Vidyasagar was a contemporary of Akshoy Dutt. The emancipated mind and love of knowledge that gave distinction to Dutt's prose, also inspired the prose of Vidyasagar, whose mature skill as a writer was commended by Tagore in these words : "He insisted that you must say what you want to say simply, beautifully and in an orderly manner...In fact, Vidyasagar introduced order into the disorderly crowd of Bengali prose, gave it the sense of period and structure, taught it restraint and neatness, and thus increased its flexibility and functional effectiveness." Vidyasagar's prose is valuable because the mind that it mirrors has extraordinary qualities. One result of his constant study of Sanskrit philosophy was that to him even abstract thought became as clear and definite in outline as sensible images. His consciousness of the modern *Zeitgeist* and a deep faith in Western philosophy made up the secular content of this prose of irresistible appeal. It was the work of a vastly erudite logician and naturally had a solid logical structure. The spirited but lucid, didactic yet argumentative, prose of *Bidhaba Bibaha* (Widow Marriage, 1855), radiates, in its flair for sarcasm and ridicule, the steady heat of the midday sun.

It was however Bankim who realised fully that the Bengali language, if properly tapped, could express the whole gamut of human thought and feelings. The novelist has left the mark of this conviction in his own wonderful and various creation. He imprinted on the face of our prose his realisation, simple as it is, that language is complex or simple, strong or mild, ornate or plain, strictly according to subject matter. Bankim discussed abstruse ideas of Western philosophy in his 'Miscellaneous Essays' with such ease and naturalness that it ought to evoke the admiration of our usually unperceptive readers.

Bankim achieved, while attempting abstract definitions of literature, a subtle and suggestive prose, extraordinarily free from verbiage and capable of rendering complex thought with effortless ease. Even when one does not agree with him one feels the charm of his manner, and his power of lucid persuasion.

1872 saw the publication of *Banga Darshan* and 1891 that of *Shadhana. Bharati* presented Tagore to us. In *Shabuj Patra* (1914) Pramatha Chowdhury made his appearance, officially as it were, in the field of Bengali prose. After

him come, to mention a few names at random, Ramendra Sundar Trivedi, Buddhadev Bose and Annada Sankar Roy. Two Muslim writers also produced significant works in Bengali : Humayun Kabir wrote his *Emmanuel Kant* and Qazi Abdul Wadud his *Goethe*. Ramendra Sundar wrote his aesthetic criticism in a language characterised by a tendency to overanalysis. He however displays an unexceptionable wealth of facts and thinks in words aptly chosen and tautly woven in the fabric of his prose. Pramatha Chowdhury treated Trivedi's subject in a racy conversational idiom, and opened up the limitless horizon of a prose able to explore the infinite resources of our spoken language. In his hands dry abstraction seems to glitter by contact with the artist's refined sense of beauty.

Rabindranath served the profession of letters for sixty-five years. There is hardly an important branch of knowledge on which he did not shed light, in his superb prose, during the period. His mind ranged at ease over aesthetics, philosophy, science, politics, sociology, painting and sculpture. Years after his death, he still remains without a peer in skill, facility of language and the richness of ideas as an interpreter of abstract thought. That no region of thought, however difficult and far lying, is today inaccessible to the Bengali language could be illustrated from his writings alone. It is needless, of course, to add that the writer's medium must possess what Annada Sankar calls 'virtue and fire'. I am convinced, that as a vehicle of abstract thought Bengali today is well past its adolescence and youth. Owing to the interest of our thinkers in metaphysics and religious discussion, their anxiety to apprehend the fundamental reality of life, poetry, the State and the universe, this aspect of our language has developed most. It seems as if the ceaseless experiment, of more than a century, with the resources of our language, was designed to cause its fullest unfoldment in this direction rather than in any other. In respect of conveying objective, scientific, and technical information our language is indisputably deficient. But this must be understood in the light of the fact that science has not entered our practical life yet in more than a rudimentary form. Hence Bengali is yet to absorb the great scientific and mechanical revolution of our times.

It must, however, be admitted that the prose found in abstract writing in East Pakistan is, in quality and structure, far from satisfactory. The reader here is unaware of the resources of the language, while the writers blame its inherent incapacity. The reasons for this unhappy state of affairs must be many, and I am unable to go into them all. I should, therefore, content myself by analysing a few works published in recent years and attempting an estimate of their merits in general terms.

When Dr. Sajjad Husain writes on Pakistan's heritage I do not reproach his style, nor do I commend it. The writer does not perhaps pay much attention to style in discussing the abstract questions of cultural tradition. But his aim has been realised. A valuable idea which, is neither novel nor complex, but deserves wide currency, has been put across in clear language. It does not matter very much that Dr. Husain uses English phrases like 'sense of values' where he could easily find an appropriate Bengali phrase for it. His ideal is not the kind of prose whose quality is determined in every word, clause and sentence used, by the logic and compelling pressure of an

idea imperiously demanding expression. It is when a writer faces such a crisis of self-expression that the native capacity of the language is on test. Something of the excellence, in abstract writing, that results from a close penetration of the subject by an alert sense of beauty, is occasionally in evidence in the literary criticism of Syed Ali Ahsan. He is a conscious craftsman and is anxious to inform his style with what is distinctive in his thought. By a turn here and a turn there he unexpectedly changes the effect of a word or syntax worn with familiarity. Sometimes it does lead to the exhibition of needless virtuosity ; but it as often sharpens the awareness of a lazy reader or gives pleasure to an attentive one. This has been made possible by Ali Ahsan's close familiarity with the whole exciting course of evolution of Bengali prose. The same knowledge of the past heritage of the Bengali language enables Abdul Hai to lend to his translation of M. N. Roy's *The Historical Role of Islam* the charm and readability of an original work. The mass of material in Hasan Zaman's *Dharma Niropeksho Rashtra o Islam* (The Secular State and Islam) demonstates his painstaking scholarship but the truth which emerges from them does not anywhere shine. In this connection, I must mention Syed Ali Ashraf's *Kabya Parichaya* (on Aesthetics) and Abdul Hai's *Shahitya o Shangskriti* (Literature and Culture). Whatever one might think of them as research documents, their style has a grace and lucidity appropriate to the subject. It is in this sense that Abdul Wadud's *Muslim Manisha* (Muslim Genius) too deserves praise. Many useful facts have been presented by the author in a not unpleasing style, but nowhere does his thought attain the level of abstraction which could be said to test conclusively the limits of the expressiveness of the language he uses. I should like to emphasise this. It is possible to illustrate my point from other works equally valuable, but there is really no need for it. The truth is that we have not done with any absorption, any serious philosophical or conceptual thinking whose subtlety, complexity, depth, or imaginative sweep is beyond the expressive capacity of our language.

The fault lies deep. Our thought is relatively shallow. It does not have its roots in the total being of the writer, and for this reason radiates no life-giving energy to the mind of the community. The claim that we have experienced a deep awakening in our minds owing to the cataclysmic realisation of an ideal demanding urgent expression cannot, I fear, be taken seriously. Even where there are signs of such an awakening, it has not found utterance in adequate terms because of the refusal to take pains. Our vanity, the home-spun notions of our provincial minds, our faith in convenient digests of Western thought are among our banes. Our debt to sources other than indigenous is well known, and yet we have not assimilated a fraction of it. A comparison of this creative poverty of a politically free people with the many-pointed richness of the Renaissance experienced by a politically enslaved Bengal in the nineteenth century would make the cause of the discrepancy between the two phenomena apparent.

We must not seek the cause of our misfortune in language alone. The Hindu mind, having at its disposal the massive resources of Sanskrit, heir to the versatile tradition of its philosophy and logic, encountered Western thought with confidence despite its unfamiliarity, and absorbed it without any

consciousness of a permanent linguistic handicap. This source of strength is no longer available to us. While the revival of Sanskrit in the context of our national culture is not possible, to many not even desirable, we are ignorant of the intellectual riches of Arabic and Persian as languages. What is worse, we failed even where it was possible to accomplish something. In other words, we have not taken the trouble to study the Bengali language deeply or carefully enough. None need be surprised that Bengali is deficient as a vehicle of conceptual thinking.

In the essay referred to earlier in the paper Buddhadeva Bose holds that "our prose shines naturally in short and simple sentences...long and complex ones, with involutions, parentheses and periods are comparatively hard to achieve. Not pestered with too many prepositions, and able to dispense with conjunctions, genders, plurals, articles and often with verbs themselves (sometimes the verb is just left out and sometimes it is better so), it has an eminently desirable lightness as well as (for one cannot, it seems, have something for nothing) a capacity for looseness that can at times be quite distressing". These limitations, according to him, render Bengali unsuitable as a medium of conceptual thought. Again, I differ, from Buddhadeva Bose. I can easily illustrate from Bose's own writings and those of Pramatha Chowdhury and Annada Sankar that it is possible to convey serious thought without the least loss of dignity in a light manner supported by short sentences. According to modern linguists the grammar or structure of no language is either favourable or unfavourable to the expression of conceptual thought. Compared with the complex grammar, now committed to writing, of the language of some American Indians, the grammar of Arabic and Persian would seem child's play. The subtlest and the most ancient philosophical thinking in the world was done in classical Chinese which is virtually a language without grammar. Verbs in the speech of the Hopi Indians do not divide time into past, present and future. While describing action, they convey the sense of time's continuity as well as its relativity. Had Einstein been born into this community he would have arrived at his theory of Relativity far sooner and expounded it better. In the light of modern linguistics it is unscientific to seek to determine the range of expressiveness of a language on the basis of its formal features.

I do not see why any one should grieve because an English phrase cannot be exactly translated into Bengali. Who would deny that rendering a Bengali phrase in other languages is at times impossible or equally difficult ? To say that the Bengali word *niti* is faulty because it has more than one meaning is naive. No word, much less an abstract word, has in any language but one meaning. The word 'principle' in English means a variety of things in different contexts: 'he held water to be the first principle of all things'; 'moral principles'; 'he has ability but no principle'; 'in all these instruments the principle is the same' etc. There are other meanings of the word which it is not necessary to illustrate.

DRAMA

Askar Ibne Shaikh

DRAMA is dependent upon the stage, for success on the stage is as important as truth to life and literary excellence. We in East Pakistan have no stage. In our literary history, the *yatra* occupies a place similar to that occupied by the Miracle and Morality plays in the history of English drama. The *yatra* has another point of resemblance to the early European plays. Unlike the courtly Sanskrit plays, both were enjoyed by the common people. In both cases the language was free from pedantry and had its connection with the people. But here end the similarities. European drama retained its early appeal and popularity, but Bengali drama did not. Modern Bengali drama had its origin largely in the imitation of, and partly in the inspiration derived from, English drama. Since the English educated minority who initiated the movement were too dazzled by the external form of European drama to have much regard for its content, modern Bengali drama became primarily a matter of imitation. Consequently, it lacked in vitality. There was another problem too. The public could not accept the innovations easily ; nor were the social and economic circumstances congenial to the growth of an Anglicized stage. The new drama failed to rouse and draw on the nation's genius. It, therefore, throve in a kind of seclusion. There was no 'Theatre Royal' or 'Duke's Theatre'. All this proves that we had no stage worth the name. The absence of a stage is still a problem with us.

As for gifted dramatists who could help create a living theatre by writing successful plays, we have none. Dramatic writing in East Pakistan has a tradition of only a decade.

Acting as a profession is yet to develop in East Pakistan. And who can deny the importance of the role the professional actors play in the development of drama ? It is said that blank verse, during its decline in England, was given a 'semblance of life for about a hundred years by a great school of rhetorical acting'. The contributions that the Garricks, the Bettertons and the Mohuns made to the history of English drama need not be enlarged upon here.

Sound criticism is always a great help to the dramatist. Most of those who write dramatic criticism in East Pakistan do not seem to realize that staging a drama is a practical experiment in which acting, scenery, and other stage accessories play important parts.

In general, Bengali drama has certain peculiarities of its own. It is richer in ideas than in action. Although it has borrowed its form from the West, its nature remains Oriental. The active, swift and conflict-torn rhythm of life which is the theme of Western drama is absent in our drama. If we, as a people, are given to an excess of sentiment, why should we, it may be asked, object to their presence in drama ? But, not so fast. Judged against the background of her society, did not Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* appear, at first sight, rather unreal ? Nevertheless she has long been acclaimed as a real human being, more real than other women in her society who accepted their circumstances without protest. In our folk tales we

have our Noras, but they lose their character when they are dressed up for the sophisticated and sentimental reading public.

The revolution caused by the European Renaissance in drama never reached us. We did not, in fact, have a renaissance of the European type. True, some symptoms of a reawakening were there. But that reawakening was at best a 'colonial renaissance'. Moreover, even if we had the desire to wake up, the avenues before a politically subjugated people were indeed few. Of course, a new light of education came, but it fell upon the privileged few. This created a type of social stratification which made the newly educated section feel itself as alien to the masses. All these were responsible for the absence in our drama of that abundant life, vitality and enthusiasm which characterise English drama.

If these are the peculiarities of Bengali drama in general, they are still the characteristic features of contemporary East Pakistani drama.

When Girish Ghosh put the life of this country into a dramatic form obtained from Europe, he in fact, gave a new impetus to Bengali drama. But that did not materially change its inward nature. The stream of writing begun by Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the first Bengali poet who assimilated the spirit of the Renaissance soon lost its sense of direction. Girish Ghosh, however, knew how to use in drama the insular nationalism of Bankim Chatterjee. In trying to satisfy the demand of the people, he dealt with religious, historical and a few social themes. His plays justify the dictum "the drama's law the drama's patrons give".

The history of our dramatic literature is, in a sense, akin to, and in another, different from, that of Bengali literature itself.

For one thing, we did not have a dramatist of Girish Ghosh's calibre. It is equally true that geniuses do not appear all of a sudden ; they come only as the culmination of a process. Individual talent can make significant contributions only after it has assimilated the achievements of predecessors. Tradition ensures its own atmosphere. As for the Muslims, they have neither got the tradition nor the necessary conditions for its growth. We did not have any heritage similar to that of the English Miracle and Morality plays and the popular Hindu theatre called the *Yatra*. The Muslim mind is traditionally opposed to idolatry and does not indulge in the personification of abstract and transcendental virtues. Unlike other dramatic literatures, ours did not get any stimulus from the religious institutions and festivities. This explains why our dramatic literature had a rather late beginning. Till recently, Muslim society was positively cold towards drama and the art of acting. When Mir Musharraf Husain wrote, in imitation of Michael and Dinabandhu Mitra, his *Basanta Kumari* and *Zamidar Darpan*, his work did not receive much approbation from the critics of drama or from society. The situation was very much like the one that prevailed in puritanical England before the Restoration.

Plays written before the creation of Pakistan had certain dominant characteristics. Some of them were written in deference to public taste. The public had its fondness for historical plays. They loved the eloquence

of rhetorical speeches, capable of moving their feelings. These feelings were most easily aroused by a type of sentimental nationalism. D. L. Roy's plays provided these feelings. But that nationalism was primarily Hindu in character. This had its parallel in the Muslim desire for a reawakening. Writings of the late Shahadat Husain and Ebrahim Khan show this desire. This innocent longing found a source of inspiration in the regeneration of Turkey. The attitude responsible for the creation of Nazrul Islam's *Anwar Pasha, Kamal Pasha* and *Jaglul Pasha* also led Ebrahim Khan to write his plays *Kamal Pasha* and *Jaglul Pasha*. Shahadat Husain is clearly imitative of D. L. Roy. But he is not so concerned with the dream of Muslim reawakening as Ebrahim Khan. Shahadat Husain's plays remind one of 17th century English heroic plays. His *Sarfaraj Khan, Nawab Alibardi, Anarkali, Masnader Moha* resemble, both in construction of plot and depiction of character, Sir William D'Avenant's *Siege of Rhodes* and Dryden's historical plays. Both Shahadat Husain and Ebrahim Khan are sentimental playwrights. The former dotes on the past, while the latter hears the surging voices of distant countries, clamouring for the regeneration of his own country. In spite of their differences both writers thus draw inspiration from religion.

There are also plays treating the problems of society. Kazi Nazrul Islam's *Aleya and Jhilimili*, Abul Fazal's *Ekti Shakal* and Nurul Momen's *Rupantar* belong to this category. Among them Nurul Momen alone seems to possess a sense of what constitutes drama. Nazrul Islam's dramatic works have undoubtedly their literary merits, but his powerful emotions are subversive of the dramatic form. Nurul Momen is more concerned with the display of wit than with social problems. In *Rupantar* society enters because there must be a plot ; the dramatist however, has other preoccupations transcending the framework of the plot. All his characters, the Darwan (porter) not excepted, are humorous persons. This reminds us of the Restoration period when the fashion of the day "favoured a straining after wit" and the leading characters in the comedies were, "consciously and almost professionally wits". True, in the play there is an excess of wit, but the wit scintillates while the humour pleases. Like Congreve's comedy of manners the dialogue of *Rupantar* is "free and graceful". Indeed , the play has "an air of refined cynicism over the whole production, the plot of less consequence than the wit, and an absence of crude realism", and although intellectual in character, like the plays of Etherege and Congreve, *Rupantar* is not passionless.

The establishment of a new State brought in its wake new inspiration and enthusiasm. And like other branches of literature, play writing also got its share of them. But inspiration and enthusiasm are not by themselves sufficient for literary creations. Many of our playwrights who took to the writing of plays did not quite realise this and presented us with plays which show no poverty of inspiration but lack in artistic quality. I must, however, hasten to add that this should not be taken to mean that there are no exceptions. Exceptions are there and we have a number of good plays too.

Nurul Momen's second play, *Nemesis*, has a commendable theme and

technique. It deals with the mental conflict of a rich black-marketeer whose soul revolts against his vocation and takes revenge on him. The dramatist shows remarkable insight into human psychology. The play has one single character who acts on the stage ; the other characters remain behind the curtain ; we do not see them, but observe how the character on the stage reacts to them. Here the dramatist has indeed set himself a difficult task. The character on the stage must at the very outset rouse the curiosity of the audience. The incidents that occur behind the curtain and their reactions on the stage must also appear proportionate. Well, it may be asked whether *Nemesis* maintains that sense of proportion. One could readily call the play a truthful representation of life and even concede to it poetic qualities ; but one does not feel so sure about its success on the stage.

Showkat Osman is a conscious critic of society and takes upon himself the task of chastening it with the lashes of his satire. His plays, *Tashkar O Lashkar*, *Amlar Mamla*, *Kakar Moni* are cases in point. Showkat's attitude recalls Ben Jonson and Galsworthy. He depicts the problem-ridden social and economic life of the country. This playwright's reformist zeal deserves to be praised, but it is not without its dangers. And the first danger involved is that of the dramatist losing his character. We must remember that he is not so much a philosopher as an observer of life. He should not deny his characters a life of their own. If the reformist zeal in a dramatist transcends all bounds, his characters tend to become puppets. He must therefore know how to stop and where to stop. Even Ben Jonson and Galsworthy, although they knew how to submit to artistic restraint, could not escape criticism. Ben Jonson has been accused of drawing flat characters who are always guided by a certain 'ruling passion' to the exclusion of other human qualities. Galsworthy has been described as excessively fond of theoretical discussions on the stage. All this proves that the path is slippery. Showkat Osman often lacks restraint. That being so, his characters look rather exaggerated and unnatural. We must not forget that the artist's social consciousness must be communicated in terms of an impersonal medium. The 'publicisation' of truth is often impeded by differences of religious, moral and social beliefs.

The dramatist must not have too many personal opinions. Showkat Osman's plays are at times crammed with opinions other than those of his characters. In this he is not as detached as the writer of *Justice* and *Strife*. His dialogue, too, is often laboured. Considering all this one feels that Showkat's plays are unlikely to be successful on the stage.

Munier Chowdhury and Farrukh Ahmad have shown their skill in writing satirical plays. Farrukh's *Raj Rajra* has the qualities and deficiencies of Ben Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour*. The poet in *Raj Rajra* is almost a prototype of the sonneteer Samuel Daniel in *Every Man In His Humour*. Farrukh Ahmad wants to hold the king, Habu Chandra and his Prime Minister, Gabu Chandra, up to ridicule and with that purpose in view, exaggerates them to the extent of making them into caricatures. But these are not mere types inasmuch as they behave, at times, like normal human beings. The dramatist maintains his detachment and lets his poet, who voices his protest against the foolish regime, have his human frailties as well.

In the play the playwright has tried to make a fairy tale stand for a modern theme. This is a limitation. And consequently naturalness has suffered. Still, like Michael Dutt's *Buro Shaliker Ghare Ro* and *Ekai ki Bale Shabbhota, Raj Rajra* promises to be a success on the stage.

Munier Chowdhury's *Kabar* and *Manush* are praiseworthy creations. His language is both pointed and polished ; his sense of humour alive, sharp and brilliant. He has translated Bernard Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* under the title *Keu Kichu Balte Pare Na.* This is a real contribution to our dramatic literature. His translation has, in fact, become an adaptation of the play. Munier Chowdhury dressed up the characters anew. The way Kabir Chowdhury has translated Clifford Odet's *Waiting for Lefty* seems a mistake. The Bengali version, *Ahban* as he calls it, is good, but it is not adapted to the social setting of East Pakistan. *Ahban* would have been more appealing had the characters been people of this country and not of Calcutta. Translations from other literatures are always welcome but we do not have much work done in that field. Maybe our indolence is to blame.

Jasimuddin's *Beder Meye* draws material from the folk life of our country and is a significant creation. Azimuddin's *Mohua* also belongs to this type. But neither *Beder Meye* nor *Mohua* can compare with the works of Synge and Yeats. They resemble J. M. Synge's *Deirdre* but have none of the latter's brilliance. Many of our plays are novels cast in the dramatic form, the playwright being merely preoccupied with the narration of his story. This makes characterisation secondary in importance. Other technical flaws apart, both *Beder Meye* and *Mohua* suffer from this general weakness.

Manchitra by Anis Chowdhury is a truthful picture of life and has been a success on the stage. Abdul Huq's *Advitiya,* on the other hand, has been denied this success. Theories are valuable for essays, but not always so for plays. This has amply been proved by *Advitiya.*

But suitability for the stage does not however compensate for the absence of other qualities, namely, congruity, naturalness and poetic qualities. Ali Mansur's *Poro Bari* and *Boba Manush* bear testimony to this point.

I" have developed this belief that Bengali drama should be written in blank verse (*Amitrakshar Chhanda*). But the change should be gradual", wrote Michael Madhusudan Dutt to his friend Raj-Narayan Bose. The models before the poet were the plays of the European dramatists. He further wrote, "I am convinced of its strength and charm. Properly recited, Bengali blank verse will, like its English counterpart, give you the sound effects of prose". Michael Dutt wanted to bring to Bengali drama the swiftness of run-on lines. But he did not have the time to achieve his ambition of writing poetic dramas in blank verse. Girish Chandra's poetic lines did not possibly satisfy the writer himself. D. L. Roy and Tagore made their attempts, but not with complete success. After them blank verse remained for a long time outside the drama. Today some of our writers are following Eliot, and becoming conscious of its possibilities. But doubts and incompetence

stand in their way. In this context, Farrukh Ahmad's recent play *Naufel O Hatim* written in blank verse can be reckoned as a novel and adventurous undertaking.

One may, of course, ask whether dialogue written in blank verse will sound natural. Well, blank verse has adaptability and although the Bengali language in modern times has changed, blank verse can absorb its peculiarities. This adaptability will prevent the dialogue from becoming artificial. Moreover, poetry has a more lasting appeal than prose. With its sound-effects poetry can create an atmosphere. The astonishing success of Shakespeare's plays on the simple and bare Elizabethan stage speaks eloquently of the inherent evocative power of poetry. A play should not only resemble reality but also create an illusion, or some hallucination, as Shaw calls it. Dialogue like other requisites of the stage, viz., decorations, acting and arrangement of light, helps create the necessary illusion. Has not the poetic prose style of J. M. Synge been acclaimed in modern times ? But the illusion has also its limits. The dramatist has the responsibility of restraining himself within those limits. If in his *Naufel O Hatim* Farrukh has even indicated the way in which this problem could be solved, he has indeed enriched our literature.

It is, however, up to the audience to decide whether dramatic blank verse should be used in Bengali drama. "All dramatic art depends," as Allardyce Nicoll puts it, "ultimately for its form and content on its audience."

The play has undoubted dramatic and poetic qualities. We need not be sceptical about its suitability for the stage, either. But the play has certain flaws as well. It does not open satisfactorily and Hatim's appearance seems rather too abrupt.

Hatim's feelings, moreover, though humanitarian are not so human. He is more noble than lovable. Compared with him, Naufel's character appears more natural. Since a good dramatist does not allow his antagonist to outshine the protagonist, this must be considered a flaw in the play. Its technique is also not modern. Had the poetic qualities of the play been complemented by technical excellence, *Naufel O Hatim* would have been a great creation. But still the play may not prove unsuccessful on the stage. What is important about *Naufel O Hatim* is not so much the excellence it has achieved as a drama as the possibilities it seems to open up before us.

It was unfortunate for the whole of Bengali drama that before it could create a Marlowe or a Shakespeare, it severed its links with the common people and lost its purpose in artificiality. Romantic sentimentalism together with a Victorian sense of propriety made Bengali drama turn its face away from reality. The language of drama was also affected by this. Bengali drama thus failed to be truthful and to unite beauty with truth.

Before Independence plays used to be written in a language removed from the ordinary conversation of the people. Dina Bandhu Mitra's plays and Michael Dutt's farces were the only honourable exceptions, and recent plays like *Chhera Tar* and *Dukshir Iman* by Tulsi Lahiri prove that naturalness of language could make characters lively. But even today our playwrights throw the rules of naturalness overboard and try to adorn

their dialogue with maxims and epigrams and platitudes. They tend to forget the fact that however impressive the outward appearance of the play might be, it will not last unless it possesses intrinsic qualities. But there are also instances where the playwrights have achieved in their dialogue both naturalness and brilliance at the same time.

These include *Nemesis*, *Kabar*, *Keu Kichu Balte Pare Na* and the like. Redeeming signs are there too which indicate that our dramatists are gradually moving towards a larger comprehension.

Like their modern English counterparts, most of our playwrights deal with social problems. Our plays depict the life we see around us—a life so unjust, corrupt and cruel. This means that our dramatists are aware of their responsibilities.

Jyotirmay Guhathakurta

DRAMA does not easily grow in a puritanical society such as ours. Our actors do not enjoy the respect due to them and so the actresses. It is no wonder, therefore, that our heritage in this particular branch of literature is not as rich as it is in the allied fields of poetry and fiction. Sanskrit drama had long ceased to exist chiefly because it was aristocratic in origin unlike its Athenian counterpart. We, in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, did not usually take drama seriously. When we did, we cared more for its lyrical portions which normally covered three-fourths of an entire play. We did not worry about the 'unities' which alone could supply the 'objective correlative' of our emotions.

Things, however, radically changed when, with the advent of the British we came to know Western forms of drama. In the nineteenth century, the educated Hindu middle class outgrew the influence of the traditional forms of dramatic entertainment and succeeded in founding a professional theatre after the European model in 1872. Impressed by the achievement of the Hindu intelligentsia, the Muslim middle class, likewise, sought inspiration in Western literary models. Fortunately, they had not to start from the scratch ; but the sanction for dramatic performances was yet to come. Ultimately it came, and all of a sudden, after independence, there has been a great upsurge of dramatic activities all over the country.

Mr. Rafiqul Islam, in a paper read at a University seminar, gave a statistical account of the progress we have made since 1951 in the matter of staging plays at the University and outside, securing the participation of women in female roles and introducing technical innovations in lighting and scenery. The account he gives makes impressive reading. During the last ten years, he writes, the University and the affiliated colleges organised

about one hundred dramatic performances at Dacca. It is important to note, in this connection, that the producers did not wait for dramas written by East Pakistani playwrights. In most cases, they staged those plays which were considered successes on the amateur as well as the professional stage in Calcutta. That is the only thing they could do when the number of tolerably good plays written by East Pakistani authors was anything but adequate for their purpose. They had to face criticism for what they did from the nationalist section of the Press as well as from people who discovered great merit in the traditional folk plays in the different districts of East Pakistan. In the preface to *Madhumala* Jasimuddin wrote : "These folk plays are more significant contributions to our literature tnan the plays modelled on Western forms staged and patronised by the educated few among us". The producers of the new drama, however, took courage, by-passed the class-war in the sphere of dramatic art and forged ahead. The result is that to-day there is literally a craze for writing and staging new plays throughout East Pakistan. The movement has gathered such momentum that it has attracted the attention of the Government of East Pakistan which is now considering a proposal for setting up a permanent theatre in Dacca

Now, I should make it clear that I have no intention to ignore what Jasimuddin said regarding the value of folk-plays or the *Yatra* in our cultural life. But Jasimuddin has himself admitted that these are, strictly speaking, opera rather than drama in the modern sense of the term. Let us, therefore, agree that we should shake off our indifference to the indigenous opera in which we are richly endowed and do everything in our power to promote their growth and development. At the same time we should not neglect the comparatively 'new' art form, the drama which is based exclusively on the spoken word and action.

The fact, however, is that our dramas, i.e., those usually produced at urban theatres and the University, have not yet completely differentiated themselves from the opera. The heroes and heroines in most of our plays burst into a song when it is least expected and manage to draw tears as well as cheers from the auditorium, especially from its female sector. It is true, common men enjoy the opera more than the drama which is comparatively new to their palate. Our producers have, therefore, the responsibility to educate the taste of the common man and prepare the ground for dramas which would be understood and appreciated by the community as a whole. Drama, it has been well said, is, primarily, the literature for those who do not read. Again, a theatre must have its roots deep in our soil if it is to be called 'national', and a national theatre alone can produce dramatists of the calibre of Aeschylus and Shakespeare, Moliere and Ibsen.

East Pakistani playwrights like their West Bengali counterparts look to the West because the West alone can offer us richer forms and novel techniques and above all a philosophy of life which can break through the fetters of arrested growth from which we all suffer. This is not to say that we should judge our achievements in play-writing strictly according to Western standards. This we could do if we had completely assimilated the Western attitudes and

methods and evolved a type of drama entirely our own. We have to go a long way before we arrive at that point. We are still fumbling for dramatic forms appropriate to our thoughts and emotions. With these few preliminary remarks I shall now try to assess the contributions of some of our more gifted playwrights to the dramatic literature of East Pakistan.

Prominent among the playwrights of the older generation who were inspired by the ideals of the Pakistan Movement are Ebrhaim Khan, Abul Fazal and Shahadat Husain. Of the three, Ebrahim Khan has been the most popular, chiefly because he brings into his plays the zeal of a social reformer. He is as critical of the snobbish officers who treat the simple villagers like animals as the conservative Mullas who thrive on their superstitious ignorance. The dramatist takes every care not to push his ideas too far and applies in the two plays he has written on the subject, the familiar trick of bringing, all too quickly, the sinners to their senses. Of the two plays *Kafela* is more widely known, although several attempts to stage it with reasonable success proved abortive. The plot is simple and centres round a conservative Munshi determined to resist the efforts of a group of enlightened youngmen to start a girls' school in his village. The Munshi ultimately surrenders when his first wife goes over to the enemy camp and starts a school right in the *zenana* of his own house. The Munshi, his first wife and Baga Mian stand out remarkably true to life but the play as a whole is a medley of farce, melodrama and caricature. With all its defects, *Kafela* is a representative play in the sense that it faithfully reflects the new sensibility of the Muslim middle class, which went into the making of the Pakistan movement.

Abul Fazal is a bit more radical in his one-act plays where he lashes at the follies and vices of the so-called leaders of society. But Abul Fazal is primarily a novelist ; he hardly knows how to relate characters to the language they speak and his humour too often degenerates into caricature. His attempt to dramatize the life of the Quaid-e-Azam is praiseworthy but he should have known the art of dramatic craftsmanship better, having had the advantage of studying the excellent models of biographical plays in *Abraham Lincoln, The Lady with the Lamp and Sri Madhusudan.*

Shahadat Husain and other minor playwrights like Akbaruddin, Ibrahim Khalil and Gholam Rahman have written historical plays which may easily be linked with our native *Yatra* tradition. Shahadat Husain being a poet, has greater command over the resources of our language, although neither *Masnader Moha* nor Anar-kali reaches the height already attained by Dwijendra Lal Roy and Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinode. The reason is, Dwijendra Lal had a wider background. He was thoroughly acquainted with Shakespeare's Histories and must have read a lot of Schiller in translation. Incidentally, towards the end of the nineteenth century Schiller's *Wallenstein* was prescribed as a text book for the under graduates by the University of Calcutta. German Romanticism, for all we know, cast its magic spell over many of the Hindu Writers who made patriotism into a cult about the end of of the nineteenth century. No such influence is traceable in the historical plays written by East Pakistani playwrights. Zannatunnessa in *Masnader Moha* is but a feeble echo of Dwijendra Lal's Nurjehan. Neither in complexity of characterisation, nor in grandeur of tragic vision can *Masnader*

Moha be compared with *Nurjehan* and *Shahjahan*. Shahadat Husain too is patriotic; he has, therefore, selected a critical period in the history of Bengal as his theme in *Masnader Moha*, and tried to draw a moral lesson from the discomfiture of a woman who would rather ruin a kingdom and defy religion than give up power. But he does not make any effort to go beyond didacticism to explore the secret recesses of the human soul and the mystery that hangs over human destiny or even to interpret history in terms of set political ideas.

The older generation of playwrights could not do much to develop drama as a distinct literary form for they were more interested in the message they wanted to convey than in the manner of conveying it. They had little knowledge of the structural peculiarities of drama and at least one of them had a positive distaste for plays written after Western models. He is Jasimuddin. Jasimuddin made his mark as a dramatist when his *Beder Meye* was staged *successfully* by a group of amateur actors at Gulistan. *Beder Meye* is admittedly, not a play cast after western model. It is a folk-play and tells the sad story of a snake-charmer's wife, Champa, who killed herself so that her husband might live, by sucking poison out of his viens. The beautiful Champa became a source of trouble to a community of snake-charmers when the headman of a certain village tried to seduce her. The snake-charmers resisted. The headman threatened violence and this worked. Champa sacrificed her honour to save her community from destruction. Her husband married another woman and Champa was thrown out when she was no longer of any use to the headman. Champa returned to her husband only to find that she had no place even there. She chose death.

The play is characterised by lyricism of incomparable beauty made more colourful by the use of dialect in the dialogue.

It is poetry cast accidentally in dramatic form. In Act 1, Scene 4, where a plan which should have normally taken quite a few days to mature was executed as soon as it was made. I mean, the headman's plan to terrorise the snake-charmers. The motivation for the rejection of Champa by the headman is weak and the dramatist does not seem to be worried about that. The time is ideal as in all folk plays and the play has no pretence to deep philosophy. On the stage, the play is likely to appear intolerably monotonous and when it comes to action, violently melodramatic.

When Nurul Momen's *Nemesis*, a long one-act play was published in 1948, it created a furore among East Pakistani intellectuals ; its author was hailed as the first conscious artist in dramatic craftsmanship in East Pakistan. *Nemesis* is a perplexing play in that it is a long dramatic monologue spoken by a character interrupted only by voices reaching him through the telephone. The author claims it has no predecessor, although some critics have tried to discover resemblances between this play and *La Voix Humaine* (The Human Voice) by the French playwright Jean Cocteau. But there is no doubt that it is a bold departure from the realistic style and could be, if we could find a talented actor, good theatre. What is more, it is good literature. The hero, a school master turned a blackmarketeer during the Bengal famine of 1943, is made to lose his soul for the sake of love. He suffers from a severe spiritual crisis which is resolved when, at the point of death, he

regains his soul. The suspense has been well kept up and the climax appears inevitable. *Nemesis* appears to be a modern version of the Faust story, although its author, does not reach the sublimity and tragic grandeur of a Marlowe or a Goethe.

Nurul Momen's next play is a comedy called *Rupantar* which tells the story of a scholar who goes abroad and comes back with a new outlook on sex and marriage and rejects the girl who was betrothed to him and whom he never saw. He falls in love with his lady secretary whom he decides to marry, but a letter from his betrothed unsettles his will. The crisis is resolved with the discovery that his lady secretary is his betrothed in disguise. The comedy does not reveal any satiric intention. The author's chief preoccupation being a war of words, the intrigues and situations lack colour. *Rupantar* is closer to the Comedy of Manners than any other form of comedy known in Europe. It follows faithfully the trend of wit initiated by Tagore and Pramatha Chowdhury and resembles in part Tagore's *Chirakumar Shabha* in respect of situation and character. Although his puns and epigrams sometimes appear laboured, many of these scintillate with a brilliance entirely their own. I am thinking of his definition of a modern girl in *Rupantar* and passages in *Nemesis* where wit and passion are happily blended.

Nurul Momen blazed a new trail in East Pakistani literature which was subsequently enriched by the contribution of the younger generation of playwrights who combined a sense of form with a more conscious appreciation of the needs of society. Of the few plays Nurul Momen has written only *Nemesis* can be said to have affinities with the outlook of our younger playwrights. Mr. Momen is a sort of link between the old and the new. Let us now turn to the younger generation of playwrights and especially to those who write plays which are not only good theatre but also good literature. Prominent among them are Showkat Osman, Munier Chowdhury and Askar Ibne Shaikh. They all write on social themes and do not seem to be interested in dramatising history.

Of all the plays staged in recent years Showkat Osman's seem closest to the spirit of classical comedy. Like the classicists he seems to believe that the mission of comedy is to laugh at the follies and vices of men, not just to tell pleasing tales of romantic love. The object of his attack is the contemporary upper middle class society which thrives at the expense of those at the bottom. His classicism and realism have, therefore, not a little of political leftism in them. In his earlier play, *Amlar Mamla*, he could not completely free himself from the romantic idealisation of the educated youth, a theme most exploited by the East Pakistani playwrights. And his portraiture of a British-trained civil servant in the same play is ludicrously inexact. *Kakor Mani*, which seems to me to be better than anything he has writtten so far, presents as its central figure Sulaiman, a cynical merchant who trades in human lives by selling foodgrains mixed with small stones imported from Jedda and the sand of the Rajputana desert. He hoards foodgrains in empty graves with the help of two grave-diggers whose greatest boast is they can bury a man alive. Sulaiman who knows how to bribe an officer who matters, is in trouble when he fails to persuade Jamshed Chowdhury, a high official, to agree to his terms. He desperately seeks the help of a young

barrister named Azad who is being considered by Chowdhury as a prospective son-in-law. Sulaiman promises to pay Azad a lac of rupees if he could deliver the goods. Azad succeeds but Sulaiman feigns death to cheat him. Azad, too, feigns death to draw the sympathy of Shakila, who, he thought, was in no mood to yield to his entreaties. Sulaiman is outwitted by Azad at the grave-yard. Azad wins both the money and Shakila. The drama ends in a moral chaos like the *Alchemist* of Ben Jonson thus defeating the very intentions of the dramatist. The play, though realistic, is full of improbabilities, but the satire is enlivened with fun and merriment. The author here has displayed a better grasp of aristocratic manners and attitudes than he did in his earlier plays. His dialogue is sharp and witty and sometimes sparkles.

But there are lapses of a serious nature which show the dramatist's inability to relate his dialogue to characters. The lines Shakila spoke when her father introduced Sulaiman to her are an instance in point.

With all these defects the comedy was a great success on the stage and is certainly a most significant contribution to the dramatic literature of East Pakistan.

Munier Chowdhury tries to make drama subserve 'social truth' and loves to secure effects by novel theatrical means. In his *Kabar*, a one-act play, he freely uses techniques introduced by the German expressionists in order to communicate forcefully the paradoxical idea that the living were more dead than the dead themselves. The language used is violent and the characters appear silhouetted against a hellish background at a grave-yard. A scene of fantasy is introduced when the dead rise and speak and it goes well with the scene of grotesque reality that the play as a whole presents. The characters are symbols, not individuals, and have been deliberately made so. One is easily reminded of Ernst Toller's remarks about expressionist plays: "These pictures of 'reality' are not realism, are not local colour, the protagonists are not individual characters". The political leader who ordered firing anxiously waits for the safe burial of the dead before dawn. His only fear is the students might use the dead bodies in their demonstrations if they were not buried at night. This was done but not without incidents. Strange things happen at midnight. A Fakir whose madness is not without method, comes and speaks mysteriously of the dead, who he thinks, are, indeed, very much alive. He smells death in the person of the leader who was drinking hard to get rid of his nervous fear. The dead rise from the grave and create complications for the leader by refusing to go back to their graves. The police inspector who is a dare-devil and is perfectly at home in this weird atmosphere of the grave-yard and ghosts, is the real hero. He acts while the leader remains passive throughout the play and cleverly manages the entire show. The entire scene breathes an atmosphere of hysteria. The author displays the crowd emotions in all their violence in his bitter irony and unabashed exploitation of pathetic effects.

There is melodrama in this play but melodrama which moves. This technique of representing man in the mass and elevating the figures into positions where they become representative of social forces has been exten-

sively used on the Continent and in the United States by playwrights who sought to make drama serve the purpose of political action.

Waiting for Lefty, by the American author Clifford Odet, belongs to the same category of dramatic composition, and Kabir Chowdhury's Bengali adaptation shows that he, too, has perfect control over this novel technique. The reason why he has selected Calcutta as the scene of action is perhaps that socialist ideas and sentiments are better understood in West Bengal than in East Pakistan. In adding verisimilitude to his adaptation, Kabir Chowdhury has scored a point over Munier Chowdhury whose adaptation of Shaw's *You Never can Tell*, though equally competent, so far as language is concerned, lacks this particular quality. It will be difficult to find a Mrs. Clandon or a Gloria in East Pakistani society.

Askar Ibne Shaikh, by far the most popular of the younger playwrights, equates the pattern of drama with the pattern of reality itself. But his heroes belong to a different world. Usually they are, like the heroes of Ali Mansoor (*Porobari*) and Quazi Muhammad Elias (*Smuggler*) and of other playwrights who write to oblige the amateur actors, all young dedicated souls.

Askar Ibne Shaikh is doing for the middle-class intelligentsia of East Pakistan what the Sentimental Drama did for the rising bourgeoisie in eighteenth century Europe. While watching his plays on the stage, one recalls Diderot's theory that serious comedy 'whose office is to depict virtue and duties of man' must present 'touching scenes based on events, natural in character and harmonised with the customs of the time'. Askar's stress, too, is on a vague humanitarianism, moral generalities, crimes of land-lords and their managers and sympathy for the common man. Almost all his plays are alike in that he repeats themes and situations and paints characters in black and white.

Askar Ibne Shaikh knows what is good theatre and is the most prolific of all the playwrights in East Pakistan. Although his main interest lies in social themes, he has written a historical play based on episodes connected with the Sepoy Mutiny (*Agni-Giri*) and musical plays based on the ballads of Mymensingh. He has affinities with Jasimuddin in that he, too, freely introduces lyrical elements in his plays. But he does not have Jasimuddin's skill in the use of dialect. One can easily detect the influence of Tara Sankar Banerjee in his attitude to the decadent landed aristocracy of Bengal, which is a mixture of pity and admiration.

Mention must be made of an interesting experiment in verse drama called *Naufel O Hatem* by one of our well-known poets, Farrukh Ahmed. Any one who reads it will be struck by its stylised diction far removed from ordinary speech. But we all know that in our times a verse play can succeed only when the dramatist follows the Wordsworthian maxim that the language of poetry should be as close as possible to the language of ordinary conversation. Secondly, the play is so over-written that the dialogue hardly leaves any scope for dramatic action. Thirdly, it has almost all the defects of the didactic plays of which we are so fond.

Syed Waliullah's *Bahi Pir*, a P. E. N. prize-winner, suffers from similar defects. In some places the speeches of the priestly hero extend to as many

as sixty lines. But Waliullah's hero is quite a character and the situation of a sex-duel between the sixty-year old Pir and his young wife has a novelty entirely its own. *Bahi Pir* in the last analysis, is a novel cast in the form of a closet drama.

Playwrights like Ashrafuzzaman, Abdul Huq, Obaidul Huq shine in isolated scenes but they lack the skill of constructing a well-made play. Abdul Huq's *Adwitia*, in spite of its many defects of construction, is perhaps, the first domestic play based on the problem of polygamy of which the dramatist fails to find a satisfactory solution.

Before I conclude I must confess that my purpose in this paper is not to attempt a survey of the entire field of contemporary drama but to indicate, in general terms, the qualities our playwrights possess and the deficiencies from which they suffer. Fortunately, our playwrights do not suffer from the malady of complacency, one great defect which blocks all progress. Our playwrights work within limitations both internal and external. It is not within their power to remove some of these deficiencies, especially the external ones. Here the entire community should step in or the State or the University. It is interesting to note that all the four well-known playwrights, Nurul Momen, Showkat Osman, Munier Chowdhury, and Askar Ibne Shaikh are teachers. The University, therefore, can easily take the initiative in removing some of the physical disabilities which are hampering the growth of drama in East Pakistan. Why not build a permanent theatre right in the University and introduce a course in Dramatics like the universities elsewhere ? The Pakistan Arts Council like its counterpart in Britain also could help. Small groups of actors at Dacca and in the districts are but too eager to respond to an offer of this kind. It is a pity that our businessmen would rather invest capital in the film industry than in the theatre.

As regards internal limitations, our playwrights should try to remove the most important of these, i. e., formlessness by devoting greater attention to the formal aspects of drama. Joseph Wood Krutch, a drama critic, observes in his book, *The American Drama since* 1918 :

> "It is worthy of remark that the playwrights whose names most persistently reappear in any discussion of the possibly permanent achievements of the contemporary drama are those in whose work the formal element is conspicuous."

We, in East Pakistan, are rather too fond of romantic tragi-comedies and melodrama of all kinds. Is it impossible to introduce order into this chaos ? Again, to feed the ever-increasing demand for suitable plays, our playwrights had to adapt a large number of novels for our theatres, a practice which has resulted in the confusion that anything written in the form of dialogue would be good for the theatre. We should remember that dialogue in a play must leave enough scope for action and, therefore, has very little in common with the dialogue that a novelist uses in his narrative.

Secondly, in the plays we write, we tend to simplify the psychological issues involved in mental conflict. We have, indeed, very little grasp of the irrational in man. We are, therefore, the poorest in the art of characterisation.

Our artistic vision seems to be highly coloured by the dogma that all men are potentially good and would be actually so when seasoned by the trials and tribulations of life. We lack the vision that sees a sinner in a saint. The remedy for all these, however, lies in the very nature of the diagnosis.

Thirdly, we have not yet succeeded in writing plays which have appeal for the entire community. The more sophisticated among us tend to ignore the folk plays, and a much larger section the dramas, that are produced at urban centres. This stratification in aesthetic taste is hardly conducive to the growth of drama in East Pakistan. Remember what the writers of the folk-play did, faced with a similar situation, toward the beginning of the twentieth century. They adapted for their 'Arena Theatre' plays produced on the 'Picture-frame State' at the permanent theatres of Calcutta. Today great actors like Sisir Bhaduri have started a movement for a return to the 'Arena Theatre'. If we return to the 'Arena Theatre' or something like it, the techniques of playwriting will have to be adjusted accordingly. Anyway, our playwrights, actors and producers should try to bridge the gulf that exists to-day between the bare community theatres and urban theatres equipped with elaborate sets and machinery, between plays written for the intelligentsia and those written for the common man and help in founding a truly National Theatre in East Pakistan.

FICTION IN AMERICA AND IN EAST PAKISTAN

Kabir Chowdhury

BETWEEN the literature of East Pakistan and the United States there is an astonishing similarity of basic points. What is the U. S. to-day was once a part of the British Empire and the present language of the U. S. is the same as that of England and yet not quite so. In early years of colonial rule in the U. S. its literature was frankly derivative, the English note being marked. But with independence the native characteristics began to assert themselves and now for about fifty years America has given the world literary productions which no reader could mistake for the work of an English author. One has only to think of Sinclair Lewis, Scott Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Thomas Wolfe, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, along with a host of others, to appreciate that fact. But wherein lies the unique Americanness of such works ? It does not really lie in any one particular feature. The growth of colloquial American language and the ever increasing use of it in American fiction and the selection of themes which are peculiarly native to the soil, such as, the expansion of the frontiers and the problem of innocence and violence, to mention only two, are responsible for the passing of the English influence. Another was, of course, the impact of continental literature—the influence of Chekhov, Turgenev, the symbolists and the existentialists. Now the U. S. has a literature of its own which is very different from English literature. Not only that. It is a literature which has an astounding richness and vitality and which exercises great influence on various writers all over the world. When I emphasise American literature as being distinct from English literature, I do not overlook the many similarities that exist between the two. But they are broad points in common which would always exist in literary creations of the same period, whatever be the country of their origin. From that point of view, a literary kinship could easily be established with many writers who are writing in different lands to-day, including our own.

Like the U. S. of about two hundred years ago, we were also a colony of the British only a decade ago. East Pakistan was a part of United Bengal of undivided India. West Bengal in India to-day has Bengali as its language and free from foreign domination its writers are creating new works in profusion, though in the field of literature the departure of the British did hot create any very colossal impact. Bengali literature was already a rich, powerful and vital one by 1947 with a clear tradition of its own— a tradition built primarily on native sources but reinforced by English and Iranian influences. So when the British left, the writers of West Bengal who were mainly concentrated in Calcutta and were mostly Hindus felt a natural elation in the country's obtaining its freedom, but apart from that the root of their literary tradition remained more or less unshaken and fairly undisturbed. In Bengali literature, however, before the advent of Pakistan on the map of the world the life and stories of the geographical area which now forms East Pakistan found only an insignificant representation. Muslim life was seldom treated by Hindu writers

and Muslim writers who wrote of the people of East Bengal were very few. However, East Pakistani life came to be the subject matter of Bengali literature in increasing proportions from the 30's of this century, but since 1947, the year when East Pakistan emerged as a separate political area and part of a free Muslim country, the literary activities of this region have been unprecedented. That is understandable. For East Pakistan the departure of the British meant much more than what it meant for West Bengal. Many of us looked at it as the beginning of an era of emancipation not only from the political slavery of the British but also from the economic and cultural domination of the Hindus. A number of Muslim writers who had been writing from the days of undivided Bengal came over to East Pakistan and helped depict scenes of this region and portray the lives of its people in poems, plays, short stories and novels. Many young writers also made their appearanc for the first time on the scene. They found the material for their stories and their novels in the life of the peasant, the fisherman, the bricklayer in the city, the political worker, the hypocritical religious preacher, the ruthless blackmarketeer and the middle class government official. Scenes of flood and famine, of heartless exploitation and of the hopes and longings and frustrations of the people of the soil were dealt with by them, sometimes weakly and ineffectively, sometimes with sincerity and integrity. In short the various aspects of life to be encountered in contemporary East Pakistan were reflected in one way or another in its contemporary literature. And of all the different art forms it was in the field of fiction, to be more specific, in the field of the short story that this reflection found not only its widest representation but also its most artistic expression. That was one of the reasons why I chose to discuss our contemporary fiction to the exclusion of our poetry and drama.

The predominant feature of our fiction is that of realism. Our writers are portraying life as it exists on various levels in our land to-day. Their concern is with the actualities of the every-day world : the hardships caused by flood or famine, the tragedy wrought by police killing connected with the language movement, the exploitation of the poor peasant by the false mullah, the tragi-comic efforts of the lower middle class to make both ends meet. While realism is the central note of our fiction, we can go a step farther and add that the preoccupation with social problems is another marked trait. The note of protest is pervasive in a number of young writers. Sometimes it finds expression in satire, sometimes in scenes of bitter tragedy in the lives of the under-dogs. The social and economic evils most often attacked through our short stories and novels are : (i) the economic disparity between the very rich and the very poor ; (ii) the exploitation, in the name of religion, by the *pirs*, that is, the so-called religious preachers. Incidentally, the lives of the poor peasants in the villages and of the members of the lower middle class in the cities have found, comparatively speaking, a much larger share in our literature than the lives of the labourers in the factories or of the aristocratic class in the metropolitan towns. The common man and his joys and sufferings are the stuff of which our contemporary fiction is made. In that respect it is the inheritor of the nineteenth century romanticism of England and Germany. But in the matter of treatment, in the attempt to expose the

follies, the vices, the ugliness, in all their lurid details, it follows the later traditions of realism and naturalism.

The emphasis laid on realism by our writers has been both a gain and a loss. From many of our novels and stories we can get a very good picture of the many different aspects of life as it is lived in East Pakistan. But often an author's preoccupation with social problems makes it impossible for him to retain that detachment which is so necessary for the creation of good art. His personality intrudes upon the story, his indignant protest against some social or economic evil provides for sentiment and emotion at the expense of restraint, thereby making the work ineffective as an object of art. Often, again, his criticism is merely superficial and lacks depth. It is made on a set pattern and fails to convey any deeply felt emotion. In fact, it is often a pretence at creating realistic literature by writing deliberately proletarian stuff.

I feel that our contemporary fiction is weak in respect of deep psychological probings of the human heart and in the creation of complex characters where many conflicting emotions war and where obscure motives give rise to somewhat inexplicable and strange patterns of behaviour. Secondly, there is little use of symbolism as a method of adding an extra dimension to the story. And there is very little search for the transcendental. To put the last statement differently, there is little attempt at defining and establishing the relationship of man to the Absolute. The treatment of savage elemental passion, of man for woman, is also comparatively rare and uncommon, as is the exploitation of the comic, the funny and the grotesque.

Let us now turn to contemporary American fiction and try to formulate a few generalisations. It is, however, an extremely difficult task, for contemporary American fiction is complex and many-faceted. However, if we could overcome the difficulty and did make some general statements we would immediately see that it has some points of resemblance to and a few differences from the contemporary fiction of East Pakistan.

One of the dominant themes in American fiction is that of revolt and protest. A number of their writers are preoccupied with the problems of the poor, the Negro, the underprivileged. As a matter of fact the radical novel has been occupying a very large portion of American fiction since the beginning of the present century. Often closely linked with the note of protest and revolt but not always so, is the theme of violence. It is a major theme in many of their acknowledged masters. Where it is not actual it is imminent. Sometimes the violence is portrayed in a world of grim actuality side by side with the picture of courage, integrity and endurance ; sometimes it is painted in an atmosphere of degenerate depravity, of drunkenness and debauchery linked with the comic and the grotesque ; sometimes again it is introduced in a world of private vision where the characters are under an unholy emotional stress arising from a sense of the accumulated sins of past generations. But whatever be the particular associations, violence in the best American fiction is never merely accidental or a cheap means of sensationalism. It is, on the contrary, an all-pervasive, brooding presence like Fate. It is inherent in the scheme of things and inseparable from the general chaos of the world. What produces the complexity in American

makes extensive use of satire and irony. Lately he has introduced a more genial kind of humour in some of his short stories. A very fine example is *Matshya.* That poverty, repression and a sense of frustration can breed strange and perverted ideas of revenge in the mind of the exploited poor is demonstrated in *Thutu* and *Pinjrapol.* The story called *She Keman Kore Swarge Gelo* is also admirable in its restrained satire.

The economy of language, the crisp, terse style, the staccato sentences and the entire lack of comment by the author considerably intensify the tragic implications of the tale without impairing the tone of criticism and veiled accusation.

Alauddin Al-Azad is of the same school as Showkat Osman in the sense that he too writes of the poor and the underprivileged. His writings are also characterised by social criticism and realistic depiction of contemporary scenes. His main weapon is not, however, satire. Azad's point of view is clear in his tales. His sympathy is always with the ardent revolutionary. The spirit of undaunted determination and of ceaseless struggle against cruelty, repression, political hunting of the leftwinger and the exploitation of the poor characterise most of his work. Sometimes his indignation against the existing evils gets the better of the artist in him and gives the story a touch of propaganda. Occasionally it becomes a kind of documentation of contemporary events heavily commented on by the author. An over-emphasis on literal realism, in such cases, weakens the story. That is the fault one finds not only in Azad but in many of our contemporary writers. But Azad at his best gives no indication of such shortcomings. There the social or economic problems are implicit and not allowed to assume a disproportionate importance. In such stories the propagandist, the reformer, the mere recorder of events disappear and the artist and the interpreter of life emerges. Consider the story *Brishti* in his latest book *Andhakar Shinri.* There we have the evils of the misuse of religion, of superstition and absence of charity and understanding in the mind of the ignorant villagers portrayed for us realistically and faithfully. But the problems are always kept in the background. They are suggested rather than expressly stated. Here is the skeleton of the story :

The rains should come, otherwise the crops will be destroyed by drought. Hajee Kalimullah is certain that some one in the village has committed a grievous sin and that is why the showers are not coming though long over-due. Prompted by the gossip of Zaigun he makes up his mind that the widow Batashi is the adulterous sinner, though she is really innocent. The poor woman is cruelly punished. While this is happening in the village council Hajee Saheb's youthful third wife is irresistibly drawn to her young stepson and on the very night when judgment is pronounced on Batashi by her husband she finds fulfilment in illicit union with her step-son. When Hajee Kalimullah starts from the council for home after turning out Batashi from the village he notes with joy and gratification that the rains have come. On reaching home he is surprised to find his young wife standing in the rains getting thoroughly drenched in a gay, reckless mood.

In selecting the moment of the coming of the rains and in the reference to the new harvest there is a terrible irony. But there is no comment by the

author, no expression of anger or hatred. In fact the restraint gives the story its artistic excellence. Besides, this is one of the few stories in our contemporary fiction where the sense of an irrepressible sexual attraction has been skilfully depicted. Here the suggestiveness, the emotional overtones and the somewhat poetical language have helped the writer in producing the desired effect.

Syed Waliullah is another of our major writers. In him, too, realism is the predominant note but he is a better artist than many because his insistence is less on literal realism and more on psychological studies of characters. *Ekti Tulshi Gacher Kahini* is one of his best stories. The author's restraint, his conscious subordination of the problems of migration, arising out of the partition of the subcontinent, to the depiction of the emotions of the various members of the middle and the lower classes in a rather difficult situation, in short, the insistence on the human element and not on the political or sociological one makes it a fine story. His *Lal Salu* is a remarkable novel. The narrative has an easy, smooth flow and the characterisation is convincing. The psychological probing into the mysterious regions of the heart of the central characters is not superficial but deep; above all, the creation of an atmosphere appropriate to the theme has been completely successful and the story thereby gains in suggestiveness and symbolic implications.

The novel is built around Majid who makes for himself a position of respect and material prosperity by exploiting the ignorance and superstitious beliefs in religious matters of the people of a village. He chooses the grave of an unknown long-dead and gives out that a saint had made it his last bed. He has the grave covered with red cloth and succeeds in creating the belief in the mind of the ignorant, God-fearing villagers that the grave in red *salu* has miraculous powers of healing. Such things are not unheard of in our villages but Waliullah makes a unique use of the material for the purpose of his novel. In most of our contemporary writers similar themes have been treated in ruthless satire or made ridiculous by irony, exaggeration and light hearted banter. But Waliullah is a conscious, careful artist and he keeps his own personality aloof. The story is told as objectively and as dispassionately as possible. There are occasional satiric touches as in the description of the *Peer Sahib* who comes to Awwalpur and for a time threatens Majid's unrivalled supremacy in the local spiritual world.

But in the main satire is not the dominant note in *Lal Salu*. The author has exposed in a number of scenes the stupidities committed by ignorant villagers. He has also indicated quite clearly that their simple-souled ignorance is mercilessly and shamelessly exploited by scheming men like Majid. The story, however, is great not because of such scenes but because of the skilful way in which Majid's character has been created and the way the oppressive and strange atmosphere of fear and mystery has been built around the purple-clothed grave. Majid is no ordinary impostor. He believes in God and is religious in his own way ; when he knows that a lie has to be told or a completely fictitious story related as gospel truth he does so quite unhesitatingly but in the next moment he mentally asks God's forgiveness for being forced to have recourse to such deception for purely earthly reasons. He has deep insight into human psychology and knows how

to handle difficult situations. The way he combats the menace of the Peer of Awwalpur and dismisses the unwelcome efforts of Akkas to set up a school in his own village of Mahabbatpur is clear evidence of how shrewd a judge of character and situation he is. Majid is not completely dehumanised, though. Towards the end when Rahima is moved to pity the poor girl Jamila, Majid undergoes a conflict in his mind. But he is nothing if not cautious and wise in a worldly sense. He wants above all things material security and a position of respect and honour for himself. He has hardened his heart to achieve these things and yet there are moments when he, too, feels vaguely uneasy and afraid. And with a superb stroke of irony Waliullah makes the grave of the nameless nobody, practically the creation of Majid, the source from where springs his own fear and uneasiness.

Apparently, Majid is not the typical portrait of the false *mullah* caricatured in hundreds of our short stories. His character has a depth and a complexity infrequently found in the picture of the stereotyped *mullah* in our fiction.

The other thing which makes *Lal Salu* such a remarkable work is the skill with which the atmosphere of mystery has been woven around the central object of the novel namely, the grave. The frequent association of the grave with the back of a fish, the fantastic story of its supposed miraculous powers, the strange effect it produces on the rather rebellious Jamila : all these combine to make it at once fascinating and powerful. In fact it is the purple-clothed grave which is the hero of the book and not Majid. And this grave is also the symbol of all that is made use of by religious preachers to evoke fear and respect and a sense of mysterious awe in the mind of the common man. Here lie the deeper implications of the novel. It deals with a basic fact about religion : the place of unreasoning fear and vague mystery in any interpretation of it, and not with merely satirising the hypocrisies of the false preacher. *Lal Salu*, I repeat, is one of the finest of our contemporary novels, if not the finest.

In Shamsuddin Abul Kalam, another major contemporary writer, preoccupation with social problems is less pronounced than in Showkat Osman or Alauddin Al-Azad. Almost all his writings are, however, built around the poor village people of the south-western watery regions of East Pakistan and the question of economic and social problems is implicit in nearly all of them. His *Path Jana Nai* is a celebrated story where he depicts the complexities and confusions created by the inroads of the so-called metropolitan civilisation into the quiet and peaceful life of the village of Maultoli. The writing is forceful, the atmosphere effectively created and the dialogue intense and true to life. But the point of view expressed at the end of the story is vague and sentimental which considerably weakens its total effect.

Shamsuddin has not the gift of satire that we find in Showkat Osman. Nor has he so far exploited the comical aspects in the lives of the rural people. He has rather a poetic sensibility which enables him to paint on the one hand excellent pictures of natural beauty and violence and on the other of emotional characters madly in love with each other or suffering terrible agonies of jealousy. *Banya* is a powerful story of savage elemental passion painted against the background of dark forces of nature.

Shamsuddin's *Kash Baner Kanya* is one of the few of our contemporary novels where the hand of the conscious craftsman is discernible. The story is gracefully told and the characters are drawn in broad brush strokes. The novel has a lyrical quality, a rather uncommon feature in contemporary fiction in East Pakistan. The emotional overtones are, however, sometimes too pronounced and verge on the sentimental. What is characteristic about this novel is the deliberately wide implications that the novelist tries to convey. It is not merely a story where a few topical problems are posed and a solution suggested. It deals rather with some fundamental truths of life and has a sweep and a range not often found in the majority of our contemporary fictional works. If this is a virtue it is sometimes a weakness, too, when the novel reads like an idyllic pastoral romance.

Abul Fazal, Mahbubul Alam, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Abu Rushd have made important and significant contributions to the growth of fiction. They do not belong to any coterie or group. Social problems engage their attention and are treated in their writings with restraint and intelligence. In their latest writings, however, we hardly find anything particularly bold, imaginative, or novel, either in the conception of character and situation or the handling of their materials. A somewhat different kind of a writer is Abu Ishaque, the author of that fine novel *Shurja Dighal Bari.*

Shahid Saber, Shahed Ali, Syed Shamsul Huq, Sardar Zainuddin, Anis Chowdhury, Munier Chowdhury and Zahir Raihan are among others who have written excellent short stories in recent years. They are all very young and their best works, one can reasonably hope, are yet ahead of them. Mention may be made of Shahed Ali's *Jibrailer Dana* as an example of one of our finest short stories. The central theme is a very ordinary one : the extreme povery of a widow and her young seven or eight year-old son. The little boy wants to shake up God to the realization of their terrible poverty, for sitting high up above the seven skies in His lofty throne God seems to be completely indifferent to the lot of of His poorer creatures. And in the efforts of this little boy, Shahed Ali has drawn a fantastic image which is nevertheless vibrant with sincere emotion, without being sentimental or melodramatic. The boy flies a kite—his favourite pastime—and he goes on sending his kite higher and higher till it can catch up with God's throne. Then he will give it a sharp jerk and awaken the Indifferent Lord and compel Him to listen to the iomplaints of Nabi and other unfortunates like him. In drawing this cmage Shahed does not allow any note of propaganda to interfere with it.

And one day when the kite goes up very high in the sky a huge bird gets entangled in the line and off goes the kite beyond Nabi's control. He is at first convulsed with grief but is delighted the next moment to think that the bird is no other than the angel Gabriel come to convey Nabi's message to God. He is convinced that God will at last learn about their miseries and promptly remedy the sad state of affairs. He comes back to his dilapidated cottage in a happy frame of mind but is greeted by a beating from his mother for neglecting his duties in the tobacco shop where he is supposed to be working as an apprentice. At last he falls asleep and dreams of Gabriel flying through the skies with his kite bound for the throne of God in the seventh heaven. The angel crosses the sixth sky but the brilliance of God's near

presence almost burns his wings. Then the door of the seventh sky opens and a burning ray dazzles Nabi's eyes. He covers his eyes with his hands and wakes up from his dream-ridden sleep only to find the sun shedding its bright rays through the broken wall of the cottage.

The world of dreams and the world of reality clash and the story ends with a bang. This is one of the few short stories of contemporary East Pakistan where a fairly successful attempt has been made to make use of symbolism for the portrayal of a mood and an emotion.

If I have discussed our contemporary authors somewhat sketchily and have emphasised their excellences more than their weaknesses, I have done so primarily because in nearly all the previous sessions of this Seminar we discussed their work fairly in detail and with particular reference to their weaknesses. There are surely many deficiencies in our contemporary fictional writings. I have indicated some of them in earlier sections of my paper. I shall refer to them again before I conclude. The weak works comprise so large a proportion of our fiction that to illustrate the weaknesses one could quote almost endless passages with very little trouble. But my paper does not pretend to give a complete survey of all that we have written in recent years. I have, therefore, deliberately confined myself mainly to indicating the trends and the broad features of fictional writings and have discussed only a few of our important writers individually and with particular reference to their best work, merely incidentally.

Ernest Hemingway is among the greatest of the contemporary American writers. In him the note of violence is clearly marked but his awareness of violence is a complex one. He is also a finished craftsman. The emotions he writes of are almost always stirred by pain and killing. So most of his novels and stories are built around war and big game hunting, fishing to kill rather than for fun, bull-fighting, and love which is keenly aware of the body and frequently quite akin to violence. What is important in Hemingway, however, is the manner in which he records and communicates the emotions roused by and connected with violence. Firstly, there is the famous Hemingway style. It is deliberately bare, shorn of all redundancies and highly disciplined. The other thing is the emphasis on integrity. For Hemingway falsification of emotion is an unpardonable crime. In him the portrayal of violence is never merely for raising the hairs. Over his scenes of violence rises the picture of the man who is brave and courageous and who knows that the world is a tough place where the timid and the squeamish are doomed to destruction. For an illustration of the emphasis Hemingway places on integrity let us turn to a passage in *The Sun Also Rises*. After establishing the fundamental lack of integrity of Jake's friends, Hemingway takes them on to witness the brilliant display of Romero fighting the bull.

"Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The other twisted themselves like corkscrews, their elbows raised, and leaning against the flanks of the bull after his horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger. Afterwards, all that was fake turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling. Romero's bull-fighting gave real emotion, because

he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and I always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time".

In Romero Hemingway sees not merely the man who pursues a dangerous profession. He becomes for him a symbol of integrity itself and like Romero, Hemingway abhors the fake. With his own tools, namely words, he wants to render the emotions "pure, straight, real and unfaked". Besides, his violence has a perceptibly moral aspect. When the world is seething with violence man can exist only at the cost of tolerating an abundance of pain. In *The Old Man And the Sea* courage, fortitude, and patience became the great virtues. Here is noticeable, too, the other trend towards symbolism. The old man and his *marlin* are never much other than man and nature in their final but unresolved conflict. The fish does not remain a mere fish but assumes a dignity and a grandeur not unnoticed by its hunter, the fisherman. The old Man also assumes a heroic personality in his stoic courage, particularly towards the final stages of the battle.

A very different writer from Hemingway is Faulkner. He is a ceaseless experimentalist and is often a difficult writer. In his stories violence is always imminent when it is not actual. It is difficult to imagine more violent situations than those in *Light in August*. His characters almost always act under an unholy amount of stress. They are tortured creatures, preys of peculiar obsessions, suffering from anxiety-states. And they feel the presence of an evil force in the Universe operating ruthlessly, pitilessly, unceasingly. Sometimes they find themselves to be the agents of such a force, sometimes its victims. It is the omnipresence of this always imminent, nameless, evil which gives Faulkner's novels their peculiar power. In Faulkner, however, the treatment of evil and violence reaches a new complexity and dimension because of the simultaneous presence of a vision of innocence. His famous story *Bear* has been considered by a number of critics as 'the greatest paean to innocence in all American literature.' Faulkner is also important as an experimentalist in form. His stories and novels cannot be considered on the same level as those of Farrell or Dos Passos. He is not a realist in their sense at all. He has a private vision, which is essentially tragic. An understanding of that is a prerequisite of an appreciation of his work. His manipulation of time, his technique of viewing the actor through the personality of a particular character and then suddenly making a shift to another character without any very clear indication and his language, may create difficulties for the unsophisticated reader who wants merely a pleasant story ; but they offer a rich and rewarding field of enjoyment to the painstaking reader who is prepared to study and try to understand him. In him we notice the fusion of reality and illusion. His portrayals of violence are not merely pictures of dehumanised degeneracy. Joe Christmas of *Light in August* is a complex character, dehumanised through forces beyond his control. He is the symbol of modern man 'stripped of his humanity by the rigidities of both religion and economics'. When I say that Faulkner has a private vision I do not mean to say that he is a dreamer. His work has a definite concern with problems. The problem of the Negro and of the complex in the South loom large in his novels. But we do not get in him a literal documentation and a massing of facts as we get in Farrell. He does not deal with problems from any merely

topical or contemporary point of view. He tries to go deeper and wants to probe the psychological factors of the past which produce the complexities of the present.

In Erskine Caldwell, the author of *Trouble in July*, *God's Little Acre* and *Tobacco Road*, to mention three important ones, we find the element of violence, a major trend of contemporary American fiction, treated in a different manner. He makes debauchery and lynching, juvenile delinquency and drunkenness and prostitution the stuff of his novels and stories. His characters are nearly always in the process of degeneration. But he almost always mixes comedy with violence and the result is fascinating when the mixture is artistic and flawless. In *Trouble in July*, for example, we find the violent temper of the mob, sex-lust and blood-lust, and lynching, but along with these we meet also with the funny and the comic, particularly in the characterisation of the fat sheriff Jeff McCurtain. Sometimes in Caldwell we meet with the funny and the horrible in the same people. Of course there is a lot of exaggeration and horse-play in his humour but they fall in their place when Caldwell succeeds in writing in the true folk-humour tradition. It is only when he tries to be merely sensational or deliberately grotesque and macabre that he fails to evoke the appropriate response.

I stated before that there was an amazing richness, variety and complexity in contemporary American fiction. It is evident from the above brief discussion, all too brief, I am afraid, of Hemingway, Faulkner and Caldwell, that violence, symbolism and the comic play a major role in their writings, both thematically and in shaping their total vision. I am now going to talk a little about another important element which is a feature of quite a large proportion of contemporary fiction. And this feature has a very close parallel in our contemporary fiction. I am referring to the note of social criticism. Most of the critics of the 30s in America were preoccupied with social problems. They wrote in the main tradition of realism and naturalism and arraigned American civilisation in ruthless, brutal terms. They include Sinclair Lewis, the author of *Babbit* and *Arrowsmith* and *Kingsblood Royal*, Dos Passos, the author of *U. S. A.* and *Manhattan Transfer*, and James T. Farrell, the author of *Studs Lonigan*. The trend of social criticism has come down even to the present decade and is still a dominant force, as is evident from the works of Norman Mailer and James Jones. We find in their writings merciless exposure of the follies and crimes and iniquities of American society but, to quote a critic, "the probings, the exposures, muck-rakings have always been carried out in defense of the promises that have been falsified, perverted or broken ; these novels, too are the expressions of the American dream. Novelists like Dreiser, Dos Passos, Farrell, O' Hara, Mailer and Jones have chastened because they loved". We could use almost the same words about our contemporary writers writing in the tradition of realism and naturalism and preoccupied with social problems. We, however, miss in our writers the existence of one like Dos Passos who combines in him the artist, the historian and the social rebel. There is little emphasis laid by our authors on form. Their criticism again is frequently superficial and coloured by sentiment and anger and their realism is only on the surface. Not that this does not happen in American fiction. There, too, in the radical novels we sometimes

get the melodramatic confrontations, oversimplifications of issues and consequent falsification of character and infatuation with violence for its own sake. But in the case of American literature a fairly good number of novels and stories rise above these weaknesses and succeed in being good art. In our case that happens only rarely. While discussing the note of revolt and criticism in contemporary American fiction, mention must also be made of Howard Fast who uses the technique of the traditional historical novel for radical purposes. The keynote of all his novels is the revolt of the oppressed against the oppressor. "The conception basic to most of his work is a dialectic of revolutionary development whereby certain past events are revived as acts in the extended drama of mankind's struggle towards a classless society." Consider his *The Last Frontier*, *Freedom Road or Spartacus*.

But I must say a few words about the really contemporary writers of America, young novelists and writers of short stories who have been writing only during the past ten years or so. We all know, more or less, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Caldwell, Farrell—the established and the older group, but less known are Peter Taylor, Conrad Aiken, Louis Auchincloss, Wright Morris, Jessamyn West, Shirley Jackson, Flannery O'Connor and Shelby Foote. A number of them are excellent as regional writers. Peter Taylor, author of *A Long Fourth* and *A Woman of Means* and Foote, author of *Shiloh* write with vigour and brilliance of the South. So does Truman Capote. Many of the younger writers of America are intensely interested in symbolism. Conrad Aiken and Shirley Jackson, among others, have made excellent use of symbolism. Most of the writers display a strong awareness of the importance of form in what they write. Eudora Welty is perhaps the best example of the polished craftsman, among the younger writers. The emphasis on form and symbolism, however, do not make the better of their contemporary short stories lifeless or artificial. On the contrary, in many stories, for example, in Eudora Welty's *Petrified Man*, Peter Taylor's *Cookie*, Conrad Aiken's *Silent Snow*, Flannery O'Connor's *The River* and Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*, we perceive both skill and life. The feeling and tang of a situation in such stories are vividly presented and the characters admirably suggested with careful detachment and understatement.

From this somewhat rambling survey of the contemporary fiction of the two countries it will be clear not so much by direct illustrations as by indirect implications that many of our contemporary novels and short stories suffer from the following deficiencies :

(i) Too great a preoccupation with social problems (and that too rather superficial) and without any deep analysis of the psychological and sociological factors that produce them.

(ii) Lack of adequate attention to the form and craft of fiction.

(iii) Sentimentalism.

(iv) Over-emphasis on literal realism with little attempt at exploiting the possibilities of other literary techniques like symbolism and expressionism.

We should not, however, from the above survey, or for that matter from any survey make a categorical and unqualified statement about the

comparative superiority of any country's literature over another. It would not be fair to say, for example, that Faulkner is greater than Waliullah or Hemingway superior to Showkat Osman. Such an approach would be futile if not meaningless, for a country's literature can be best judged and assessed only with reference to the traditions of that country—literary, social and religious. We make a mistake when we pronounce an unqualified verdict on a writer of ours comparing him with an English or an American or a French author.

CONTEMPORARY WRITING IN ENGLAND AND EAST PAKISTAN

Syed Sajjad Husain

AT the seventh seminar on Drama Mr. Munier Chowdhury questioned the utility and wisdom of the comparative method of criticism. He said that there was not much use in evaluating Bengali writing in the light of the performance of English writers and vice-versa. Whilst it is true that all methods of criticism, comparative or otherwise, are capable of being abused the fact remains that the very concept of criticism presupposes the measuring of one thing against another. If the comparative method were derided as futile and useless not only would much of the work of great critics appear superfluous but even such monumental achievements as Toynbee's *Study of History* and Spengler's *Decline of the West* might seem to be not evidence of almost superhuman energy and powers of intellectual organisation but monuments to the stupidity of fossilised scholars. It is probably wrong to contend that two human beings, or for the matter of that, two human societies can really be alike. But all aesthetic, all sociological, all literary criticism stems from the assumption that despite differences and the uniqueness of all individuals, there is something common to all of them, which enables us to compare or contrast one with another—with profit to ourselves and to others.

Mr. Buddha Dev Basu, the well-known West Bengali critic and novelist, in one of his essays has also deprecated the tendency to judge Bengali writing in relation to English literature. He went on to say in that essay that to expect a *Romeo and Juliet* or *King Lear* from Tagore was as senseless as to expect an 'Ode to a Nightingale' from Ezra Pound. This is hardly a correct analogy. If it meant that Tagore and Shakespeare functioned in two different climates of thought with different backgrounds, the observation would be unexceptionable. But if it meant that the complete lack in a literature of works of the same order as *King Lear* or *Romeo and Juliet* does not point to a serious lacuna, one could be inclined to dissent emphatically from him. Taken too literally and without regard to such implications it would be indeed used in defence of mediocrity and worthlessness. Every immature author writing in a language other than the more developed ones, could, by invoking the principles underlying Mr. Bose's observation, place himself on an equality with the best and the greatest in other literatures.

It is, however, hardly necessary to labour the point, for, manifestly, the whole history of literary criticism since Plato has been an application of what is basically the comparative method. The great Greek dramatists are not honoured because they wrote in an ancient language. The respect and homage which the world accords to them is a tribute to the qualities which successive generations of critics over two thousand years have repeatedly discovered and rediscovered in them in the perspective of literary development all over the world. Now to say that Mr. X, a writer in a hitherto unknown dialect, is as great a dramatist as Aeschylus, or even to say that no one should think of Aeschylus or Sophocles when considering his work because Mr. X

represents a different civilization or a different aesthetic tradition, seem preposterous. To do so is to deny that there is such a thing as good taste or decency, or such a thing as a basic concept of beauty, truth or morality irrespective of race, nationality and colour.

I agree that when a literary work is not a mere ineptitude and has reached a certain commonly accepted standard of excellence one doesn't by comparing it with a similar work in a different language declare it to be superior or inferior to the other. But before a work can be said to have reached that standard of excellence it must, we think, be subjected to careful critical scrutiny by men who possess good taste and are more or less familiar with what Arnold has called the best that has been said and thought in the world. Allowing for these qualifications one could agree with Mr. Bose and Mr. Munier Chowdhury that the search for foreign labels for local products does not lead to much good.

Now it seems to me that literature as an aesthetic activity cannot for purposes of criticism be insulated from the other arts on the one hand and the general level of thinking on the other. There is a vital relationship between the standards of literature and philosophy. We have few examples of a great literature flourishing which does not have behind it the resources of a great philosophical tradition. I am aware that I have made a highly controversial statement. People would immediately think of the exceptions where, as in the case of the Elizabethans, you had a great literary efflorescence but nothing, proportionate to it in the domain of philosophical writing. My answer is that the exceptions are explained by the fact that creative writing at such periods was in itself a vehicle of philosophical thought. Besides there was a philosophical tradition in England deriving from More and others.

The proposition I am trying to establish is that the best way of understanding the divergence between contemporary English and Bengali writing is to compare the levels of philosophical thinking and the general climate of thought in England and East Pakistan during this period. The basic facts may be summarised as follows : England has a long tradition of political and cultural freedom. To us in East Pakistan freedom is still a novel and rather mysterious concept. Till 1947 the writer in what is now East Pakistan had to contend with at least three distinct threats to his autonomy. One was political. It would be ungenerous of us not to recognise in the light of current developments in the world that we did enjoy a certain amount of cultural freedom under the British but there were points where political conditions interfered with the writer's freedom of expression. The second threat came from bigotry. Not that the religion or religions we professed are in themselves inimical to freedom but the religious conventions which people have developed have been used to suppress freedom. Attempts were constantly made to define the boundaries which the writer must not cross and beyond those frontiers, should he dare cross them, lay the threat of religious excommunication. There were subjects which he was encouraged not to write about, topics to which he could refer only at his own peril, spiritual problems whose existence he was told not to recognise. The third threat to his freedom, largely an extension of the second, was represented by his social inhibitions. The outcome was much the same : a narrowing of the

world inside which he could function freely. The three threats gave rise naturally to three corresponding types of fear ; fear of political repression, fear of spiritual excommunication, and lastly, fear of social ostracism. I am not trying to say that these fears were wholly unkonwn in the West but it would not be untrue to hold that no such combination of political, social and and religious fears existed in England during any of the four past decades of the twentieth century. I am assuming of course that freedom is indispensable to literary or artistic work. "It is necessary", says Shaw in his introduction to his pamphlet on the Sanity of Art, "for the welfare of society that genius should be privileged to blaspheme, to outrage good taste, to corrupt the youthful mind and, and, generally, to scandalize one's uncles." Now the fact is that we have never had the freedom or perhaps we have never wanted the freedom, to scandalise our uncles. It is significant that in the long course of our literary history of over one thousand years we have not produced a Langland fulminating in emphatic and indignant tones against religious evils or a Dean Swift tearing the masks off our social and religious institutions or a Samuel Butler satirising our political follies.

Perhaps most people would say: "What about the post-Independence years ?" I doubt myself whether political independence has made a major difference to the situation. Fear of the British has probably disappeared ; religious bigotry most probably is not as strong a force as it was fifteen or twenty years ago. But these fears have been replaced by others equally strong, which have made it impossible for the writer to think and write as a really free person should do. We know that writers and artists have to earn the freedom they need ; it cannot be given to them as a gift on a platter. The writer must, if need be, face ostracism in order to be true to his own genius. But whatever the explanations the critic of literature has to recognise the existence of these fears as a hindrance to artistic activity. This matter looked at sociologically seems extremely fascinating. On the one hand our literary aspirations are those of a comparatively sophisticated people. But we have not resolved the contradiction between these aspirations and our wholly irrational assumption that literature or art can flourish when society regards its basic institutions as too sacred to be attacked or criticised. Here is an illustration from current English history which will throw some light on this point. Most of us have heard of the *Angry Young Men* in Great Britain led by Osborne and Colin Wilson whose contempt for the Establishment is boundless and is matched only by their hatred of the populace. Consider for a monent how unreasonable it is to expect an Abul Mansur or a Showkat Osman to rise to the stature of great satirists when we are not prepared to grant them even a quarter of the freedom which the *Angry Young Men* enjoy.

"All real art," writes Mommsen the historian, "has its root in individual freedom and a cheerful enjoyment of life, and the germs of such an art were not wanting in Italy ; but, when Roman life substituted for freedom and joyousness the sense of public obligation and the consciousness of duty, art was arrested and, instead of growing, necessarily pined away. The culminating point of Roman development was the period which had no literature. It was not till Roman nationality began to give way and Hellenic cosmpolite

tendencies began to prevail that literature made its appearance at Rome in their train."

Political questions apart our treatment of even such social questions as sex has been characterised by a timidity and lack of candour which even when compared to the so-called prudishness of Victorian England appears startling. In the paper on Sex that he wrote, for the fifth seminar, Dr. Sarwar Murshid painstakingly collected a large number of illustrations from contemporary Bengali fiction designed to cast light on our writers' attitude towards sex. The conclusion which one drew from them was that with some exceptions we have not learnt to discuss sex without being obscene or vulgar. I imagine that one of the signs of maturity in an adult is the ability to talk about sex without a smirk or without descending to the level of the gutter. You have people in the West even among writers who delight in filth but they are not given a place in the history of literature. But men like Lawrence, Huxley, or Joyce deal with sex as adults, not sparing our feelings but without being guilty of the kind of appallingly bad taste that we notice in Mahbubul Alam's *Gope Sandesh*

Qualitative differences apart, I think one's general impression from a comparative study of recent Bengali and English writing is that there is a kind of amateurish immaturity noticeable in our approach to religious, social and political problems which hurts a sensitive Bengali reader who is aware of the work of Western authors. At the third seminar on Satire, Mr. Momen drew a highly instructive parallel between Abul Mansur's *Food Conference* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. He admitted, and we all agree, that no matter what we might think of the uselessness of comparing English and Bengali writing *Animal Farm* is much superior as a work of art to *Food Conference*. As a skilled craftsman in his own language, Mr. Abul Mansur ranks quite high but where he seems to lag worlds behind Orwell is in his attitude to the basic issues. Orwell brought to bear upon this fable a trained sensibility, an educated intelligence, a grounding in the politics and sociology of his times and, above all, an acute understanding of man's fundamental spiritual dilemma. He is able to raise his fable to a level where it becomes not only a highly successful allegory of the current conflict between communism and the free world, but a tale of man's weaknesses, limitations and inadequacies. What is not easily understood is why *Food Conference* should be something so terribly provincial unless one accepts the premise from which I started that there is a vital relationship between the levels of philosophical and creative thinking. The difference in quality between two works from this point of view reflects the difference between the two backgrounds from which they have originated ; one rather narrow, provincial, existing in isolation from the main streams of world thought, the other centrally situated and exposed to the blasts of free thought.

If we considered the entire literature of our country, genre by genre, the opinion which we have just stated could be fully illustrated. Take poetry first. If Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Auden, C. Day Lewis, Louis Macneice, Dylan Thomas are the great names in English poetry in the last thirty years, let us think of their contemporaries in East Pakistan : Farrukh Ahmad, Abul Husain, Ahsan Habib, Shamsur Rahman, Abdur Rashid Khan, Ashraf

Siddiqui, Talim Husain and among the elders Jasimuddin and Ghulam Mustafa. One would agree, I suppose, that the English poets give the impression of being much closer to the central problems in modern civilisation than our poets. Direct comparisons are invidious and hurtful but I think there is no escape from the fact that the quality of thought in the poetry of English writers is on the average distinctly subtler and finer than the quality of thought in our poets. Mr. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui in his paper on Poetry at the second seminar fully admitted this fact. I would only add that the difference is not accounted for by any racial distinctions but by the simple fact that they (the English writers) bring to the service of poetry a much greater degree of erudition than any Bengali poet of our time would consider worth while for the sake of poetry. I should make it quite clear that quotations or allusions as a proof of learning cannot in themselves improve the quality of poetry. But what learning does to the poet's mind is of much greater consequence. If his mind is a kind of catalyst, the greater its perceptiveness, its sensitiveness and its awareness of the subtle nuances which distinguish one thing from another, the greater its power and receptivity.

A Jasimuddin is something always unforeseeable ; so in England is a singer like Masefield or Davies. But these exceptions do not in any way weaken the validity of the theory that poets writing today without any awareness of the great literary heritage which the world possesses, in other words poets who write as though Aeschylus or Petrarch or Shakespeare or Dante or Baudelaire had never existed would undoubtedly fail to hold the interest of a modern audience. True, every writer has to begin by learning the alphabet but that need not prevent him from profiting from the slow evolution which is constantly in progress in the world of arts and letters.

Turning to prose fiction next, one is confronted by the contrast between E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Graham Greene, Maugham, Evelyn Waugh, and, among the younger writers, Kingsley Amis, on the one hand and Mahbubul Alam, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Abul Fazl, Shamsuddin Abul Kalam, Waliullah, Abu Rushd, Shahed Ali, Sardar Zainuddin, Alauddin Al-Azad on the other. Again, allowing for the fact that they belong to two different cultural backgrounds there is a qualitative difference between the works of these novelists. Mr. Jyotirmoy Guha-Thakurta, in the speech he made on satire at the third seminar, pointed out that what the writers in East Pakistan lacked was a world vision. Dr. Murshid while commenting on Mr. Siddiqui's paper on poetry made an equally acute observation when he said that he found no writer grappling with the problem of faith and unbelief in the manner of the great Western writers. The latter fact appears doubly surprising when viewed against the general background of the influence of religion on our lives. The conclusion, therefore, is unavoidable that. by and large our writers lack the quality which Matthew Arnold once described as 'high seriousness'. There is a disproportionately large amount of dilettantism among our writers which detracts from the quality of their output.

The same criticism could be made of our drama which suffers from the additional disadvantage of being written by people who have little direct

knowledge of conditions in modern theatres. Without going into details I should like to offer a general observation applicable to both drama and fiction which perhaps explains our backwardness, such as it is, in these respects. There is a fundamental antagonism between the concepts which inspire drama and the novel and the essentially medieval cast of our minds. Our people are really much closer in thought, feeling and sensibility to Chaucer and his age than to a twentieth century writer like Noel Coward or Christopher Fry or Andre Gide or Arthur Koestler. A writer who sets out to write a novel or a drama cannot help being indirectly influenced and inhibited by the pull of this antagonism and he has to produce his art in his own despite, as it were. Besides there are the all-pervasive political, religious and social fears surrounding him. Considered from this point of view the really surprising thing is that our writers should have been able to achieve even what they have done. There is yet another consideration which we must weigh carefully. The tremendous spurt of literary and dramatic activity which has been a feature of our cultural life in the past decade is a phenomenon of very great significance and promise. Assuming that the fears to which I have referred are mastered gradually, there is no reason why the promissory notes which are being uttered today would not have their fulfilment in something really worthwhile.

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